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CHRISTIANCOURIER

Teens and the CRC

Bethany Van Lingen

Teenagers are leaving for university, and when they do so some are leaving the church.

In response, Christian Reformed leaders are re-evaluating the work of the church and creating new patterns in home missions to high school aged youth.

James* was thinking about leaving the CRC because he just didn't feel heard.

James, of New Dundee, Ont., had questions about the CRC, about infant baptism in particular. He would ask adults at his church and some elders why the church performed infant baptisms. But

James, a Grade 12 student, didn't find answers and felt as if he was getting a lecture rather than a conversation about a topic he was passionate about.

"At the CRC, it's hard to communicate with the adults. I think it is because of the generation gap. Part of that is immigration. So much has changed in 60 years," James, 17, said.

James eventually joined a non-denominational church in his community and has continued exploring his faith there.

This sort of loss of young people is saddening not only for the individuals involved, but also for

the church.

"We want to embrace our youth," said John Zwart, the chair of council at Drayton CRC. "They are the future of the church. The whole denomination is changing and our youth will be at the front of that."

James wanted to better understand the theology of the church. It is essential that young people are taught the theology of their faith and how to express it

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Involving young people in worship connects them to the larger life of the church.

Arab Christians in the Holy Land

Dena Nicolai

This is the second in a three part series on Israel-Palestine. The third, which will run in second August issue of CC, will discuss in more detail what positive role the church in the West might play in the Holy Land.

Among the many sobering elements of the current state of affairs in Israel-Palestine is the slow departure of Arab Christians from "the Holy Land." Numbering approximately 250,000 people today, the percentage of indigenous Christians in Israel and the Occupied territories is under steady decline due to factors that include low birth rates, emigration, economic stagnancy, discrimination and, primary for many, the effects of conflict.

As scholars, religious leaders and others continue to advise, this decline could be a great loss for future possibilities for peace. One of these voices is that of Yazid Said, a Palestinian Anglican priest from Nazareth who holds a PhD from Cambridge University in Medieval Islamic Political and Legal Thought and currently teaches a course on Islam to American university students in Jerusalem. He articulates the situation well: "If [indigenous/Palestinian/Arab] Christians disappear [from the Holy Land], the conflict might become solely Muslim-Jewish, which would allow for extremes to grow. The Christian presence creates balance. It brings diversity and greater engagement ... [Indigenous] Christians are important because, simply, the Holy Land depends on and needs the Body of



Arab Christian worshippers carry a large wooden cross as part of a Good Friday procession in Jerusalem.

Christ. This is where things happened. Christ has no body but ours, and this body must continue here, both liturgically and in action."

Charles M. Sennott, an Ameri-

can journalist, spent a number of years reporting in the Middle East, culminating in a thorough exploration of the current state of Christianity in the region in his book *The*

Body and the Blood: The Middle East's Vanishing Christians and the Possibility for Peace. Like Yazid, Sennott discusses the Church as a bridge between East and West, between Muslim and Jew, and between all varying sides in the conflict. The newest edition of his book has an image on the front of the 40-day siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 2002, during which Palestinian militants barricaded themselves inside and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) set up camp outside. Sennott interviewed one of the priests who chose to stay inside for the entire 40 days, and closes the preface to his book with the priest's words: "I think in the end our presence and our prayers saved both sides from even more killing, from turning

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News

Teens *continued*

others, Lesli van Milligen, pastor at New Life CRC said. Students aren't taught these lessons in secular university.

It is also important that young people are taught by their churches how to navigate the shift to university. At New Life, leaders gather once a month with Grade 12 youth and talk about questions they have around the transition from high school to university, college or work.

But for young people like James, leaving their home church and denomination doesn't always end with finding another church home.

Growing in faith, says Zwart, is what makes kids stick around church. One problem facing young people can come out of the youth programs themselves. If youths are funnelled into a program specific to them and are not offered options outside of that program, how can these young people be part of the larger church body and participate in the church as adults?

Worship

Van Milligen says that young people need to be involved in worship with all generations of their churches, which will prepare them for church life outside of youth group.

Young people may also be drawn into worship or praise teams as part of their larger involvement in the church. James enjoyed being part of worship at his CRC church.

Eden Mekonen, 17, also loves to be part of worship, but she sees the divisions worship style has caused between younger and older generations in the church. She doesn't understand it.

"I love hymns. There can be a balance. I just feel like it doesn't have to be that big of a deal," Mekonen said.

Mekonen, a Grade 12 student, also wishes that the church would invest more time in young people.

"If we're going on a SERVE trip people will donate. But when it comes to being involved, they don't want to be there. I understand that they have time conflicts, with their families and with work. But the church is supposed to be a community," Mekonen, of Cambridge, Ont., said.

Lisa Krygsman, 15, also wants to see more connection between the youth and adult generations.

"It would be nice to have a place to meet and people from the church to look forward to seeing every week. It would help to include the youth more and make our church more of a community," Krygsman, of Guelph, Ont., said.

Krygsman, who attends First CRC, is excited to begin

the mentor program next year. In this program, youths would meet at the homes of church members for their weekly meetings.

Hilma Steenbergen, director of youth ministries at Community CRC, says, "Our ultimate goal is for students to hear the faith stories of people from our community."

Mentoring is one way to foster bonds between young people and church members. Steenbergen is looking to develop real and deep relationships between youths and members of the congregation.

Candice Deweerd has been a long time member of her church's youth group. Now, she is about to head off to university. Deweerd, 18, does wish, however, that she had been part of a mentorship program throughout high school.

"It would be nice to have someone to talk to me and keep in touch with me even after I leave," Deweerd, a Grade 12 student, said. ➤

*Name changed by request

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Arab Christians *continued*

the church into a blood bath.... I think there is something mystical in that. Even if our presence as Christians here is fading, I think the siege showed just how important it is that we hold on. The priests and nuns and all of us who stayed in our church and refused to let the church become a battlefield were trying to bring the teaching of Jesus, the lessons of non-violence and forgiveness, into all this. I don't know if anyone heard the message, but I hope they did."

The Western church

Despite the tragedy of this decline and the importance of a continued Christian presence, many Arab Christians feel little solidarity from their fellow Christians in the West. In a land revered as a place for pilgrimage by Christians across the world, it has become unfortunately apparent that indigenous Christians – the "living stones" of the Holy Land – are often ignored in favour of the "dead stones" of ruins and tourist sites. As noted by CBS' *60 Minutes* program, "Religious leaders [in Israel-Palestine] are afraid Jerusalem could become a museum, a spiritual theme park, a great place for tourists and pilgrims, but not for the Arab Christians whose roots date back to the church's very beginnings."

There is also the problem of Christian Zionism, which leaves some Arab Christians feeling not only overlooked, but vilified. Jean Zaru, a Palestinian Quaker and author of *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, has had encounters with some Western Christians who were emphatic that she should not be in the Holy Land. "They told me I'm one of the cursed," she says, "that I stand in the way of God [for living on the land that they said was promised to the Jewish people]."

Yazid feels that Western Christians and Christians in the



Bethlehem Bible College has two campuses, the original in Bethlehem and Galilee Bible College in Galilee.

Holy Land must work together on changing the narrative. Over and against Christian Zionism, which seems to suggest that humans must further the State of Israel to usher in the second coming, we should remember that fulfillment of prophecy and promise is God's initiative, not our own. He is emphatic: "The present state does not equal the Biblical Israel." He adds, echoing many others, both Israelis and Palestinians, "I have no problem historically with a safe haven for Jews, but the way it's been done is problematic."

The continuing work of reconciliation

Amidst these realities, there are many Palestinian Christians who remain committed to the cause of reconciliation, motivated by their faith. Salim Munayer, a Christian who lives in Jerusalem, started an organization called *Musalaha* (which means "reconciliation" in Arabic) in 1990, to promote greater unity among Israeli and Palestinian believers. "I didn't want to start [the organization]," he says with a wry smile, "but I had to. If you're a Christian who follows the cross, this is what you must do. We need both the vertical and horizontal aspects of the cross," referring to not only the saving grace but to the reconciliation and call for unity brought in and through Christ. "I want to see unity aside from nationality, without losing the individual."

Hedva Haymov, a Jewish believer, started working for the *Musalaha* Women's Department two years ago. The tiny Jewish Christian community to which she belongs faces its own challenges of discrimination and lack of recognition within Israeli society, but she is also adamant about the

detrimental effects of one-sided Western Christian support: "[Christian Zionists] can't support prophecy and forget about their Palestinian brothers and sisters. It is not allowed – it is against God's law to hate one in favour of the other." Though she moved to Israel 20 years ago because she feels Jewish people are called to live in the land, she says that her feelings have changed. "My views on the land are evolving. I first came to Israel with ideological views concerning the land, but I must consider justice." She rightly cautions, though, that it is always easier to judge from the outside, and that we cannot lose focus on relationships and unity within the Body of Christ.

A number of Christians see their role as continuing to promote a call to non-violence. As exiled Palestinian non-violent activist and psychologist Mubarak Awad told a journalist with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, "The key to change is in the hands of the oppressed, not in the hands of the oppressor." Mubarak – who was born in Jerusalem – was exiled by Israel because of his non-violent activism, despite the protests of the American government. He believes that, as *Haaretz* paraphrases him, "the right way to end the occupation would be a non-violent civil revolt by the Palestinians that would make Israelis' lives so difficult that they would demand their government reach a peace settlement." After losing their father in the 1948 war the four Awad brothers were raised by their mother, who strongly advocated working towards peace over bitterness. Today each brother is a strong leader and advocate of non-violence and reconciliation, and, between them and their children, they are the founders of Bethlehem Bible College, Holy Land Trust and Nonviolence International.

Radical Islam?

The question of Islam in the situation remains a pressing issue for many in both the East and West. Yet Yazid stands firm against the fear of any potential Islamic state if Palestine were to become a country. "The church and Christians should be more confident about their mission and calling, regardless of their situation," he says. "We should be firm about our identity: to show that we can do business differently, and do business well. We can flourish.... We can't go into defence mode: we will die if we focus only on maintenance."

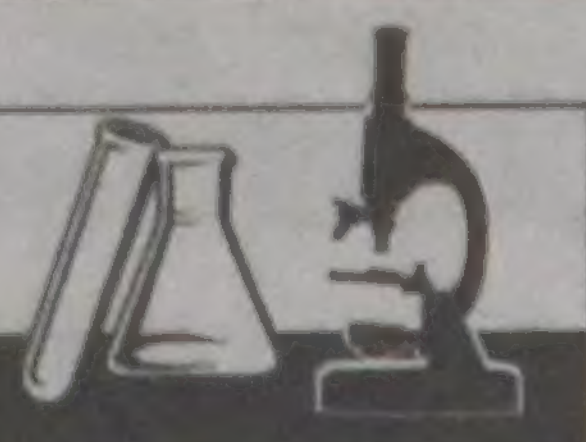
Furthermore, "This means standing up for our po-

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Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



Chance



One of the basic theological questions that influences our interpretations of faith and science is how much freedom or flexibility we believe God has given the Creation.

In science there is an increasing appreciation for the role played by chance. Many events, both at the atomic and “higher” levels of science, are random, meaning they can only be determined statistically. We may know that out of 100 occurrences 40 will go one way and 60 will go the other, but we cannot predict the direction of the next occurrence.

Radioactive decay – the breakdown of large atoms releasing energy and smaller particles – is measured statistically, and on average 50 percent of the atoms will decay within a particular time. But it appears impossible to predict whether a given atom will decay; that is a random occurrence. Nuclear medicine makes use of these radioactive substances in a variety of ways: to help diagnose illness, to treat cancer and to image our bodies. To make use of radioactive substances doctors do not need to know which atoms are decaying, but in physics this appears to be a hard limit to our knowledge.

Weather is also built on processes that are thought to be random. It is famously said that the flapping of a butterfly’s wings in China will affect our weather a few weeks later. Very small, even unmeasurable, differences in initial conditions can have large consequences later. This observation is at the heart of chaos theory and suggests that weather prediction will remain an inexact science.

In the biological sciences the changes that drive the evolutionary processes are assumed to be random. Changes to the DNA of a given creature occur by chance, and these are passed on to the next generation. Over time these small genetic changes accumulate and result in the differentiation of species.

Much of our, and other animals’, behaviour seems random, only predictable on average over a large number of cases or individuals. If offered a choice between \$5 now or \$10 next week some people will choose the immediate smaller amount while some will choose to wait for the



Weather is built on processes that are thought to be random.

larger amount. We can change the likelihood that people will wait by changing the second amount, but cannot predict what the next individual will do. The more we know about the person the better we can predict, but it is always a “guess.”

Unpredictability

All these examples describe processes that are at some level unpredictable. Some appear unpredictable in principle, others are unpredictable because we will never be able to define the initial conditions with enough precision and for others we do not know what, if anything, drives the choice.

From all these examples it appears that chance, or a random process, is built into the Creation. This leads to a very interesting theological question, if it is random for us is it also random for our Lord? There are a number of possi-

bilities. One is that our Lord determines for each atom when it will undergo radioactive decay and also controls all the other “random” events. A second possibility is that our Lord knows which atom will undergo radioactive decay but does not explicitly direct the process. A variant on this possibility is that because our Lord is above time he can see what will happen by going forward in time but does not “know” which atom will decay any earlier in time than we do. In all cases the sustaining action of God in maintaining and ordering the Creation is assumed, but the flexibility or “freedom” that God has given the Creation is different.

In the first possibility if our church burns down because it is hit by lightning, an apparently random event, the Lord made it happen. The other possibilities

suggest that if our church is hit by lightning our Lord knew or could have known it was going to happen, but did not cause or make it happen. With this position it is still possible to argue that in some specific cases God intervenes in surprising ways – we call these miracles, but they are exceptions. With the first possibility miracles are just God acting in, to us, unusual ways.

From what I see across a number of domains in science, the random nature of events suggest that God has permitted his Creation considerable flexibility and does not appear to be controlling each specific event. To my mind this makes for a much more interesting Creation, but it has theological implications which we have not yet explored fully. ➤

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Arab Christians *continued*

Yazid Said is a Palestinian Anglican priest.

space to share it.... Historically, the Christian presence has been important in the Holy Land. Christians were behind the force of creativity. They made society pluralistic and thereby forced society to think more widely. They had large roles in the politics in the Ottoman era and in transmitting Greek

litical rights,” Yazid explains. “The church does not exist in a vacuum. The church has a political mission: not to impose ourselves on politics, but to express our position on things. To live in free conversation and to insist on a free

Philosophy to Arabic culture,” he adds.

Yazid acknowledges that Muslims certainly have culpability, for example in the way in which they dealt with the siege of the Church of the Nativity when the militants chose the church as a refuge. “Muslim religious leadership has not been creative. There is a crisis in dealing with all of this,” a crisis which he feels the church can help mediate.

Still, many Christians feel caught in the middle. They are reluctant to create divisions between Muslim and Christian Palestinians, even if they feel some Palestinian Muslims are becoming more conservative. Some Palestinian Christians also suspect that creating division is a tactic being used by the Israelis in a “divide and conquer” strategy, and they are wary of this. They feel helpless against the onslaught from all sides.

Swimming upstream

In the end, it is easy to understand why so many Arab Christians continue to leave the Holy Land. Yet Salim Munayer, Yazid



Dena Nicolai is a student in the Master of Christian Studies Program at Regent College in Vancouver. She has travelled to Israel-Palestine several times and spent a month there this summer funded by the “Conway Holy Land Travel Bursary,” researching organizations and people involved in peace-building and reconciliation.

Said and others remain committed to the role and work of Christians in Israel-Palestine, no matter the challenge before them. Salim likens the situation to that of salmon: “We’re swimming upstream, and it’s difficult, but we’re laying eggs at the same time. For a better future, you must swim upstream. If you only stay in the ocean, instead of continuing the struggle, you’ll die.” ➤

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Editorials

Are Christian students losing their mind?



André Basson

Almost 20 years have gone by since Mark Noll's *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* was first published. At the time of publication, the book caused, well, something of a scandal, and one doesn't have to read beyond the first paragraph to understand why. The author could hardly have been more blunt (and controversial) when he claimed right at the beginning of the first chapter that "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Noll's beef is not with evangelical theologians, whose work, by the way, he rates very highly, but with what he considers to be the inability among many evangelicals "to think like a Christian – to think within a specifically Christian framework – across the whole spectrum of modern learning." Since then Noll has found little reason to retract or even at least qualify the main thesis of *Evangelical Mind*, as he points out in a much more recent book entitled *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (2011).



Many Christian university students would rather sit through an entire performance of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* sung in German than participate in theological discussion.

While there may be good reasons to question Noll's claim in regard to the state of the evangelical mind in general, my years of experience as a Christian Reformed campus minister at a medium-sized and very secular Canadian university have unfortunately forced me to conclude that Noll's main argument could probably be nowhere more valid than the very place where one would perhaps least expect it to be, namely among evangelical Christian

students in North American academe. What goes for intellectual activity in their circles is generally limited to that perennially popular evangelical staple, the small group Bible study. While I would be the last one to question its value in the life of my students, I do have reason to doubt whether it really helps them develop the kind of Christian intellectual framework Noll considers necessary for the evangelical mind to engage the burning issues of our time, especially when far too often the only instance of any such engagement is in the form of what could only be termed crude apologetics. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, I am not altogether sure it succeeds in providing them with the necessary wherewithal to make sense of who they are as young Christians and their place in a complex world.

How did it happen that the modern heirs of the Reformed tradition with its strong emphasis on the importance of the life of the mind have given up their birthright of intellectual engagement with the world for the potage of mere personal spirituality. Why do so many students in my experience believe that all they need is to be right with God and get into heaven? Why is it that many students I know would, if given the choice, probably choose to sit through an entire performance of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* sung in German rather than participate in theological discussion?

Misconceptions

I suspect one major reason may be the popular misconception that theology's only concern is with abstruse doctrinal issues and, therefore, only of interest to professionally trained theologians. More to the point, I believe many well-intentioned pastors and churches seeking to hold on for dear life to the dwindling number of young adults who still attend their worship services have steered clear of anything that could be construed as serious theology in their messages and in their ministry to them. In fact, it has been claimed that if anything this may only have increased the hemorrhaging of young people from mainline churches in North America (see K.C. Dean's *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*). Yet, as Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen remind us in their book, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God*, there are various levels of theological reflection, and somehow every Christian, by the mere fact of being a Christian, would necessarily be involved in at least one of them. Even more sobering is the point made by a number of scholars in their book on youth ministry, *Starting Right. Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* (Eds. K.C. Dean, C. Clark, and D. Rahn), namely that theology – albeit not necessarily a Christian theology – is actually "rampant" among young people and that they "take their theology quite seriously, even though they're not conscious of it."

In the course of a recent panel discussion on connecting with young adults that I attended at a local church, I was struck by the fact that almost every young adult who participated expressed the need not for less theology, or what some would charitably call Christianity Lite, but for more theology. Of course, they never referred to it as theology. Yet, what these young men and women repeatedly said they sought from the church and its ministry but did not always receive, could hardly be anything but theology, defined as that which will assist them in developing a sound biblically informed Christian worldview, so they can search for answers to those very troubling questions their generation in particular faces from day to day in contemporary culture.

I may be wrong, but it is not my impression that they are always looking for pat answers either. As one of my former students put it so well in an email, "André, if you pretended to know all the answers, I wouldn't come to you." Their postmodern mindset has prepared these

A beautiful and ugly testimony to war



Bert Witvoet

After 67 years of waiting for recognition, the RAF Bomber Command veterans, which include Commonwealth airmen from Canada, Australia and New Zealand, finally have their memorial in London, England's Green Park. The nine-foot-high bronze sculptures of seven Lancaster bomber airmen by Philip Jackson was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth on June 28. The £6 million memorial, which includes a neoclassical pavilion, pays tribute to the 55,000 airmen who lost their lives during the bombing raids on Germany from 1939 to 1945.

How well I remember the thousands of bombers flying over our town on their way to Germany during the latter years of the Second World War. Our pastor, Rev. John Voerman, at one time interrupted his sermon while the constant hum of airplanes could be heard overhead, and he shouted, "There go the Tommies. God bless them." We all approved of this attack on Germany. We used to sing a song about it, which translates as:

*In the clear light of the moon,
they bombarded Berlin,
they bombarded Berlin,
to smithereens.*

Way to go Allied forces!

So why did the surviving heroes of the sky have to wait 67 years before their courageous actions (half of them never returned from their mission) are properly commemorated? It's because the deliberate attempt by the British air command to focus on destroying the major cities in Germany has been severely criticized after the war. Instead of bombing the industrial areas of Germany where its war machinery was built and supplied, the bombings sought to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens, mostly women and children (the men were at the front). The execution of this policy, designed by "Bomber" Harris, would today be called a war crime. Churchill approved of the action. It was thought that by carpet-bombing these cities, the Allied forces could demoralize the Nazis to the point that they would quickly surrender. But they had not counted on the fact that Hitler was a fanatic who would rather destroy his own people than surrender. (A similar strategy was used against Japan when two atomic bombs were released on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with quicker results.)

Dresden

The senseless destruction of the beautiful city of Dresden, which had no strategic importance at all, has perhaps drawn most of the attention of critics of carpet-bombing. At least 25,000 of its citizens were firebombed

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students better than any previous generation in recent memory to appreciate the fact that our reality is far too complex anyway, something the Apostle Paul already realized when he wrote to the Corinthians that "we know in part" and that "now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:9 and 12).

However, no matter from which angle we look at the question, it all really boils down to whether, to paraphrase the hymn, it is the mind of Christ that lives in our Christian students "from day to day" and "by his love control[s] all [they] do and say." ➤

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COMMENT

License to preach



John Tamming

Twenty of us gather in Kitchener for a day devoted to the craft of preaching. It is not intended for the ordained, but some show up anyway. Instead, this is for that strange breed peculiar to Reformed churches: those with a license to preach (and yes, the James Bond jokes get old). We include a retired engineer from Waterloo, a former principal from near Woodstock, a family doctor down from Warton. The latter two are warhorses, having had 31 and 25 years of preaching each. This kind of training has never been offered before.

Perhaps it is the (unfortunate) maleness of the group and the fact that it is a Saturday, but it feels a lot like a bunch of guys poking away at a classic Mustang or a Plymouth GT. We peer under the hood and ask "What if you would shift this introduction a bit in that direction?" We hammer away on the head to get that illustration tweaked just so, or perhaps reach an agreement that the tire rim cannot be saved and toss that boring page on sanctification to the garage floor.

Professors John Rottman and Scott

Hoezee from Calvin Seminary are the master mechanics. They are providence's answer to that eternal denominational lament, "Whatever happened to great preaching?" As they say of those on the PGA tour, these guys are good. Forget the passive, use direct verbs. Toss in a quote, dramatize a conversation, use a statistic (just make sure it is accurate or the teen with his iPhone will Google the correct answer before you can say G4).

During introductions we discover a guy who has been preaching all over Niagara without a license. We give him the gears and he laughs. There is some shop talk during the breaks. I want to know the going rate. It is \$85 in Classis Huron, Niagara has just edged into three figure territory and there are whispers of a B.C. classis that pays \$150 – but no one believes it. You can do quite well on the mileage, of course, provided you drive a Corolla.

Break is over. Don't end sermons with "let us therefore, brothers and sisters" – it really gets tedious. Don't have someone die in your introduction, as those kinds of homiletical grenades tend to distract just a little. If you begin a story, be sure you finish it lest the first question in the fellowship

hall be whether that kid ever did beat the leukemia (answer, no). Want to play that movie clip from *Saving Private Ryan*? Go right ahead if you wish, but do you really want the rest of your sermon to compete for interest with Stephen Spielberg?

Lonely Sundays

Preaching by license is a lonely way to spend your Sundays. Years ago while in law school I preached the odd time in Classis Chatham. I drove to Sarnia First one morning and was introduced in the bulletin with these words: "We welcome to our pulpit this morning John Tamming who attended seminary and decided his gifts lie elsewhere." I proceeded, doubtless, to spend the next hour proving the church secretary correct in her assessment. You drop in as an unknown, meet 20 strangers in a cold basement room prior to the service, and then mount a pulpit where you survey 300 more people you don't know. You try to force some collegiality and chat about the long drive or the Leafs and then get down to business.

So why chew up the Sundays? Ego drives some, I suppose, though they tend to flame out quite-quickly. Now and then

someone with a passion for the Canons of Dort rises with an orthodox message, but, again, those with agendas tend not to last either. Some love words, I suppose. But I suspect that these farmers, engineers and social workers exhort because nothing beats that sense you have (at least on the good days) that you are assisting the Holy Spirit move through his people.

I opted not to pursue ministry, correctly sensing that pastorally I would have been a train wreck. During a break in the lecture I chatted with a guy with whom I had attended seminary a long time ago. Things had not worked out in his last parish and he was now into construction. We meandered around the sanctuary for a few moments, stroked the back of the pews and looked at but never approached the pulpit. Former Ontario Premier Bill Davis once said that his best day in the private sector could not, for sheer interest and excitement, touch his worst day in public life. I mentioned the quote to my friend and he smiled, looked at the pulpit once more and exited the sanctuary. ➤

John Tamming is a barrister and solicitor in Owen Sound, Ont.

A beautiful and ugly testimony to war *continued*

This memorial to the RAF Bomber Command was unveiled in London, England's Green Park on June 28.

Columnist Jonathan Jones writes in the *Guardian* that "no amount of stone and bronze can ever end the ethical debate about Britain's bombing strategy during the second world war.... This strategy was not accidental or unconscious.... Many thousands of civilians had died horrible deaths in firestorms that left terrible relics of shriveled, blackened victims in the cellars and streets of cities, including Hamburg and Cologne."

The debates will rage on till the end of time. There is no easy answer to the questions surrounding the existence of this memorial. Certainly the airmen were heroic and deserve our thanks and appreciation. I can still hear our pastor shout: "There go the Tommies. God bless them." And should we honour the army and the navy with monuments but not the air force? And how can war be completely ethical anyway? One could mention the fact that Hitler started it all by bombing cities in England and killing 60,000 Britons. But one crime does not excuse another, especially not since the Allied's tally of German victims is eight times larger – about half a million. Even Churchill had second thoughts when he heard about the destruction of Dresden.

The memorial is beautiful and tasteless at the same time. It honours those who sacrificed so much, and it romanticizes war and its ugly outcome. Most of these airmen were young men in their early 20s, sent out by desk generals in London to carry out their deadly plans, with a complete disregard for the sanctity of life. God bless these courageous airmen and their descendants. And God bless the people of Dresden, too. ➤

Bert Witvoet is reading Geert Mak's description of Europe during the 20th century (In Europa: Reizen door de twintigste eeuw) and is stunned into silence by reading about the atrocities committed while he and his school friends played tag during recess in occupied Holland.

into extinction, along with beautiful cathedrals and priceless art treasures. No wonder that the city counsel of modern-day Dresden protested the idea of a memorial to the Bomber Command. It was somewhat pacified by the inclusion of an inscription that the memorial commemorates *all* the lives lost in the bombings of 1939-1945. Still, the larger-than-life statues of seven Lancaster airmen, done in exquisite detail, leave very little doubt that this is a memorial to the Bomber Command crews, and not to their victims.

Sports issue oversight

Although the recent sports issue was enjoyable, there was a significant aspect missing. In 1964 for my graduating essay in sociology at a Christian teachers' college in the Netherlands I chose sport and the handicapped. In spite of the fact that I wrote to several sport organizations and institutions there was nearly no information available. Nearly nothing was done for the physically and mentally challenged as far as sports were concerned. Although there

have been some significant improvements, the major media still overlook them today, even though quite a few Canadians have done quite well in recent years. CC could have broken through this major media bias. Perhaps it can rectify its failure by giving some attention to their Olympics. A totally different aspect of sports should then become apparent.

*Bert den Boggende
Brooks, Alta.*

Christian Courier

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News

CRC, RCA leaders happy about joint church efforts

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (CRCNA) – Rev. Joel Boot, executive director of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), recently joined Rev. Tom De Vries, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), to provide the General Synod of the RCA an update about the cooperative ministries being undertaken by the two denominations.

The RCA's general synod met in late June on the campus of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., while the CRC general synod met earlier in June at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont.

Speaking to RCA synod, Boot said that he first met De Vries when they sat together at an ecumenical luncheon at the CRC's synod last summer. Following the meal, a Nigerian guest told them, "When I see the two of you, I see the heartbeat of God." Boot thought then that the comment was "a revelation how important our collaborative, cooperative ventures can be all over the world."

The CRC and RCA work in partnership to start new churches in targeted areas they call "Kingdom Enterprise Zones." The work is featured in RCA videos detailing the ministry that has taken place as the result of the two churches' cooperation.

The denominations collaborate in other areas, including disability ministries, shared technology and mission. They're also jointly producing a new hymnal, "Lift Up Your Hearts," which will be available next year. ➤



In an address to the synod, De Vries cited, as an example of this move toward a closer relationship, the work that has grown between RCA and CRC congregations in Ripon, Calif. The churches there, he said, "are taking the lead in the community" to serve and to bless the community through feeding, tutoring and a pre-school ministry.

These churches also helped to form the first-ever classis meeting between RCA and CRC representatives earlier this year. The meeting, said De Vries, is yet one more example of "ecumenical efforts and endeavours" that the denominations have taken.

Saskatchewan: Pamphleteer sues CBC over deliberately misleading broadcast

WEYBURN, Saskatchewan (LifeSiteNews) – A pamphleteer who is seeking to expose what he says is the truth about homosexuality has launched a libel suit against the CBC. Bill Whatcott says the national broadcaster misrepresented him in an October news report about the Supreme Court hearings into his battle with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.



The statement of claim filed by Whatcott's lawyer, Tom Schuck, states that in the news segment the CBC showed a pamphlet that had nothing to do with the case which was before the Supreme Court, but contained the words "Kill the Homosexual," thereby suggesting that Whatcott advocated murder of homosexual people.

"The flyer with the words 'Kill the homosexual' was not one of the three flyers in question in the Supreme Court of Canada," the statement of claim explains. Instead, it was a flyer that Whatcott had handed out two years previously, and, more importantly, the words "kill the homosexual" "were quoted as a parody on an Alberta Human Rights Tribunal Decision that found that a popular song with the lyrics 'Kill the Christians' did not constitute hate towards Christians."

"The flyer itself clearly indicated that the Plaintiff did not want homosexuals killed and that the flyer should not be interpreted as an incitement to violence," Whatcott's complaint continues. "The flyer referred readers to a website run by the Plaintiff for further explanation."

The 2003 case the flyer referred to was brought forward by Quintin Johnson, who said he was browsing for CDs at a Music World shop in Red Deer, Alta., when he found an album from the group "Deicide" containing a track called

"Kill the Christian."

"Kill the Christian / You are the one we despise / Day in day out your words compromise lies / I will love watching you die," the lyrics read.

Equal justice?

Johnson brought a complaint against the store saying he had been discriminated against, but Alberta Human Rights Commissioner Lori Andrechuk dismissed the case saying that Christians are not "vulnerable" enough and the group in question not a "credible" threat. However, Andrechuk subsequently ordered a Christian pastor who published a letter to the editor in a local newspaper expressing his disagreement with promoting homosexuality in schools to publish a retraction of his views.

In his lawsuit, Whatcott asserts that by deliberately omitting the exculpatory statement regarding the use of the words "kill the homosexual" which immediately followed, the CBC intended to expose Whatcott to hatred, contempt and ridicule.

"Anyone viewing the [CBC] broadcast would have reached the conclusion that Whatcott advocated the killing of homosexual people. That impression was false," stated Tom Schuck, adding, "If it had been true that Whatcott advocated killing homosexuals, it would have been a criminal offence for him to say so. The meaning Whatcott conveyed in the whole flyer was the opposite to the impression created by panning the first line of the song. That is, he conveyed that neither homosexuals nor Christians should be killed."

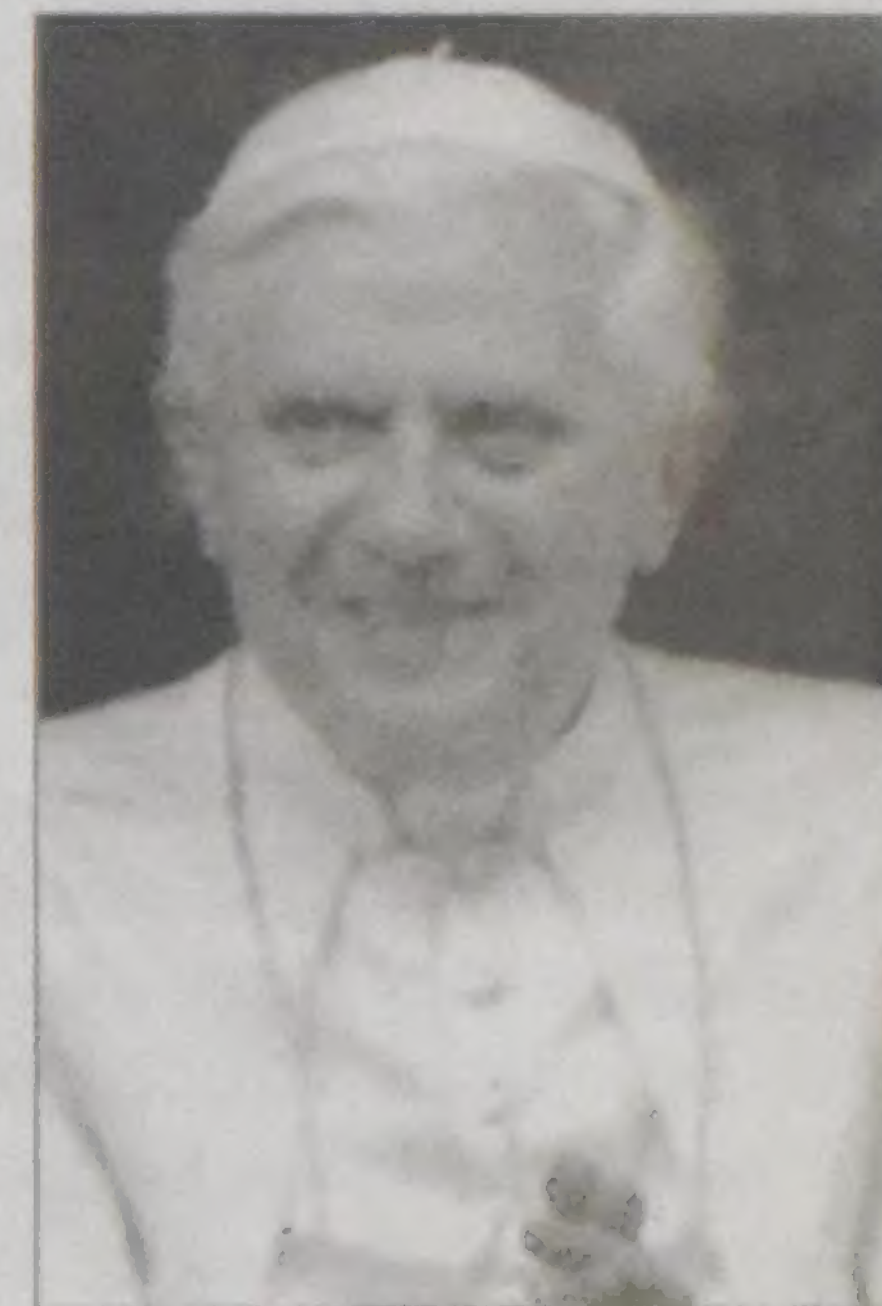
According to the statement of claim, Whatcott asked the CBC to publicly retract the offensive and misleading broadcast in a notice of libel delivered to them on Nov. 8, 2011. No retraction was subsequently broadcast, Schuck stated.

Bill Whatcott has had successful outcomes in all litigation that has been leveled against him. Most recently he won against a Crown appeal of a decision from a lower court that acquitted him of trespassing charges for distributing "Truth about homosexuality" pamphlets at the University of Calgary. ➤

Pope ponders why Latin American Catholics become evangelicals

VATICAN CITY (CNA/EWTN News) – Pope Benedict has concluded that Catholics who convert to evangelical Christianity often do so because they experience a lack of fervour, joy and community within Catholic parishes – rather than for doctrinal reasons.

"Often sincere people who leave our church do not do so as a result of what non-Catholic groups believe, but fundamentally as a result of their own lived experience; for reasons not of doctrine but of life; not for strictly dogmatic, but for pastoral reasons; not due to theological problems, but to methodological problems of our Church," the Pope asserted to a delegation of Colombian bishops at the Vatican last month.



Benedict's comments were specifically focused on Latin America, where "the increasingly active presence of Pentecostal and Evangelical communities ... cannot be ignored or underestimated."

Despite statistics indicating that more than 90 percent of Colombians still identify themselves as Catholics, in recent decades the rate of conversions to evangelical Protestantism has increased across Latin America, particularly in poor urban neighbourhoods.

That trend, the Pope believes, suggests that increasing numbers of Christians feel called "to purification and the revitalization of their faith."

Be 'better believers'

In response, he urged Catholics to become "better believers, more pious, affable and welcoming in our parishes and communities, so that no-one feels distant or excluded." He also offered practical advice, calling for better catechesis – particularly to the young – carefully prepared homilies during Mass and the promotion of Catholic doctrine in schools and universities.

If Catholics strive to follow this path, the Pope said, it will help awaken in them "the aspiration to share with others the joy of following Christ and become members of his mystical body."

Similarly important, he said, is social solidarity with those who suffer most due to poverty or violence. A 2009 survey by polling company Gallup found that nearly one in five Colombians has had a close friend or relative murdered in past 12 months.

Benedict called for increased help for those people "whose fundamental rights are trampled underfoot and are forced to abandon home and family under the threat of terror and criminality," as well as "those who have fallen into the barbarous networks of drugs or arms dealing." Such "generous and fraternal" help, he said, is not born of "any human calculation" but from "love for God and neighbour: the source from which the Church draws the strength she needs to carry out her task." ➤

News

Islamist extremists destroy shrines in Timbuktu



DAKAR, Mali (CCO/VOA) – An armed Islamist extremist group has been destroying shrines to Muslim saints in the ancient desert city of Timbuktu. The al Qaeda-linked fighters, who have used pick-axes, shovels and hammers to break earthen tombs and demolish shrines of local saints, say they are defending the purity of their faith against idol worship.

Residents of the northern Malian city, however, say the group, Ansar Dine, is entirely misguided. And some have said they are worried that condemnation by the international community will only provoke Ansar Dine to expand the destruction.

A writer and historian from Timbuktu, who requested anonymity, said, “These saints are not adored by the people of Timbuktu. The people do not see these saints as divine. They go to these sites simply to pay homage to these saints who lived so honorably and consecrated their lives to God.” He said from centuries back, Muslims of Timbuktu never venerated a human being, only God.

The historian said Timbuktu through the centuries has been dominated by many African groups, and also the French. But none ever defiled these saints as is happening today, he pointed out.

Other motivation

Several Malians said they see Ansar Dine’s talk of idolatry as nothing but an excuse. They said the group’s actions have nothing to do with Islam; rather they are part of the ongoing battle between terrorist groups and the West.

Haïdara El Hadji Baba, a member of the Malian parliament from Timbuktu, said, “Ansar Dine’s real motivation in doing this was to defy the international community.” He noted that militants began demolishing Timbuktu’s shrines right after the United Nations cultural agency classified the ancient city’s heritage as “in danger.”

The lawmaker said Timbuktu can only expect worse after the head of the International Criminal Court told the French news agency earlier this month that the actions were war crimes and called on the perpetrators to stop. “With its condemnations the international community is only intensifying Ansar Dine’s desire to destroy.”

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) rejects any correlation between its declaration and the vandalism in Timbuktu. Lazare Eloundou Assomo, head of the Africa unit at UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre, said it’s only normal that UNESCO and other international entities would denounce this destruction of “world heritage.” He asked, “Would you have UNESCO remain silent about this? No. It’s crucial that we declare that these sites are important to the entire world and it’s everyone’s responsibility to protect them.”

What about the people?

One Malian said he is troubled that the international clamour over the destruction of objects has surpassed attention paid to the people, who have been suffering for months.

Boubacar Ibrahim, a resident of Bamako who’s originally from the north, said: “I’m asking myself, why is there such a furor over the destruction of these sites in Timbuktu, while since the occupation of northern Mali human lives have been in danger. Of course I respect these sites, but there are human lives that must be protected here.” The historian from Timbuktu wants less talk and more action. “When it comes to terrorists, the more the international community butts in, the more atrocities these groups commit,” he said. “The world must stop talking and act.”

Canadian-American study shows parents experience greater levels of happiness

VANCOUVER, BC (CNA/EWTN News) – A study by a group of psychologists from the University of British Columbia and from Riverside and Stanford universities in California shows that parents experience greater levels of happiness than adults who do not have children.

“This series of studies suggest that parents are not nearly the ‘miserable creatures’ we might expect from recent studies and popular representations,” said co-author Elizabeth Dunn, an associate professor of psychology at UBC.

According to the research, the parents who participated in the study are happier and have a greater desire to live than their childless peers. It also showed that

parents experience more positive feelings when taking care of children than during their other daily activities, challenging the notion that children are associated with reduced well-being.

The researchers said the study also contradicts those who think children are a source of problems. The analysis found that children do not endanger the personal development of parents or limit their social relationships.

“If you went to a large dinner party, the parents in the room would be just as happy or happier than the guests without children,” Dunn noted.

Doctor alleges massive euthanasia in Britain

LONDON (CCO). – Speaking at a meeting of the Royal Society of Medicine, a respected neuroscientist said that euthanasia has become part of the “standard way of dying” in Great Britain.

Dr. Patrick Pullicino says that the Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP) – a protocol under which food and water are withdrawn from patients whose death is deemed imminent – is now routinely used with elderly patients who could recover.

Pullicino, professor of clinical neurosciences at the University of Kent and former chairman of the Department of Neurology and Neurosciences at New Jersey Medical School, said that “pressure on beds and difficulty with nursing confused or difficult-to-manage elderly patients” has led to a situation in which euthanasia has become “part of the standard way of dying, as it is now associated with 29 percent of NHS [National Health Services] deaths.”

That 29 percent represents 130,000 people yearly who die – on average, in 33 hours – by having food and water withheld.

Pullicino says he has personally intervened to take patients off the LCP and they went on to be successfully treated. The claim that such persons had only hours or days to live were “palpably false,” he says. As an example, he cited a 71-year-old man, an epileptic, who was admitted to hospital with pneumonia. When Pullicino returned to work after a weekend, the patient had been put on the “care pathway” and was unresponsive. His family was upset because they had agreed on that course of non-treatment. “I removed the patient from the LCP despite significant resistance,” Pullicino said.

“His seizures came under control and four weeks later he was discharged home to his family.”

The doctor continued, “The lack of evidence for initiating the Liverpool Care Pathway makes it an assisted death pathway



rather than a care pathway. Very likely many elderly patients who could live substantially longer are being killed by the LCP. Patients are frequently put on the pathway without a proper analysis of their condition. Predicting death in a time frame of three to four days, or even at any other specific time, is not possible scientifically. This determination in the LCP leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The personal views of the physician or other medical team members of perceived quality of life or low likelihood of a good outcome are probably central in putting a patient on the LCP.”

A Department of Health spokesman insisted, “The Liverpool Care Pathway is not euthanasia and we do not recognize these figures. The pathway is recommended by NICE and has overwhelming support from clinicians – at home and abroad – including the Royal College of Physicians.”

Columns

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



Loving our children into heaven



Last night we found Caleb back in the bath water after we'd put his pajamas and diaper on. Trent and I just kind of looked at each other and then looked at the bathtub and then walked away. Then we did rock-paper-scissors to see who had to change him, again.

Then there was this morning, with Jimmy singing "Jesus Loves Me" in the kitchen while I made him chocolate toast (Nutella on whole wheat). Trent and I just kind of looked at each other again, because a little boy had found God beneath our roof and it was nothing short of miraculous.

Jimmy sings and talks a lot about Jesus, as though God's a new kind of superhero and he just can't get enough of him. "Does Jesus make toys?" he asked one day, and I said, "No," and Jimmy looked disappointed. And then, "My friends, in the city, they don't know about Jesus. I hope they can meet him." So I told him we'd all meet Jesus when we died and went to heaven, and he looked very seriously at me. "My mommy says she doesn't want me to die." And I felt awful, because I'd brought up death while he was eating his chocolate toast.

"Oh honey," I stammer, "I don't want you to die, either. But the good thing is, one day, in heaven, we'll all be together and we'll eat chocolate toast and drink chocolate milk and there will be no more

bad guys." He looked down at his green pajamas with the hole in the knee. "Will Mommy be there?" he said, looking up then. I swallowed, and I believed hard. "Yes, we'll all live there together. In one big house. You'll never have to be away from your mommy again."

Sometimes these questions and these pajamas-in-the-bath get too much, but there's always grace. The other morning when I felt like my head was going to explode, the kids just up and went downstairs, leaving me and my baby. And I took Kasher in my arms, my beautiful, chubby Kasher, who just sits and smiles at me all day long, and I held him close and we danced together in the kitchen, me in my bathrobe. Witnessing the incredible.

They were black silhouettes clinging to each other at the burial ground as the cedar casket was carried. In it was the body of their 17-month-old daughter. Their shoulders shook even as the casket lowered.

No parent should have to bury his own child. It should be outlawed. Trent held me then and I wondered at me wanting to push him away. But there was no anger in their footsteps as these parents prayed by that box, kissed the face of the box, said goodbye to the child they'd waited for, for eight years. And I remembered the mother's words to me that morning: "I just wish I could have one more kiss."



Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



No crusade, please



Dandelions may be classified as a noxious weed, but there is no reason to try to remove them, root and branch, from Canada.

They can be a pest, however. Like the Biblical Israelites, the dandelions are a stiff-necked nation. As anyone who has mowed them with a lawn mower knows, it seems that no sooner have you finished the job than headless or partially-decapitated dandelion stalks arise in mute testimony to their resiliency and rotary impotence.

When we moved to our present farm, the front yard was all dandelions. What should have been a small front lawn was in reality a gravel bed. Clover had a fighting chance but grass just didn't have the root system to last more than a week or two in the spring. And so I vainly fought the European invader, the yellow horticultural scourge. Naked dandelion stalks are even uglier than yellow flowers or balls of white fluff, but I was stubborn.

In yards across North America, Killex™ – or other forms of toxic 2,4-D – are routinely applied to home properties by people who also search Farmer's Markets for safely-grown foods. Hate for the dandelion (and a few other weeds) seems to overcome other ideals.

Some cities (and this seems to be a trend) are banning most lawn and garden chemicals out of concern for human and environmental health. I think Halifax may have been the first Canadian city to do this. The landscaping industry has had to adapt and I'm sure that our botanists and chemists will find non-toxic ways to control lawn weeds. Corn gluten meal and various iron chelates are already on the market and seem to do the trick on dandelions, either by preventing new seeding or by killing existing plants.

My question is this: why bother? When a child comes to his teacher or his mother or grandmother with a bouquet of dandelions perhaps that is a testimony to the "lilies of the field" of which Jesus spoke.

When we encountered that dandelion heaven in our front



yard, we noticed that frequent mowing controlled some of the dandelion seeding. Several times in the last 20 years I've dumped a bale of peat or wheelbarrows full of chicken bedding on that patch, building up the humus percentage of the soil. Often, in fact, dandelions are an indicator plant that one's soil is too dry, lacking sufficient humus, or deficient in calcium or other minerals. Feed the soil and you will get a healthier mix of lawn plants.

Our secret weapon for soil improvement, however, has been birds. We feed whole banditries of black-capped chickadees each winter, siskins and redpolls, and several types of woodpecker every winter. By the first spring I noticed how spongy the soil was beneath the feeder due to the mulch of sunflower seed hulls. That set me thinking. Might the birds help me build soil in the same way that cow manure builds a pasture?

We began moving our feeders across the front lawn. After every move, we noticed that the soil had benefited from bird manure and seed hull mulch. We also noticed that uneaten millet and sunflower seeds often sprouted in the lawn, but they didn't survive mowing.

During the past several years we've discovered that dandelions may actually not be pests at all but resources. First, we noticed that the flocks of hundreds of pine siskins (similar to goldfinches, but not as bright) clamp onto a stalk of seeded dandelion, shuffle sideways until the stem bends over into an arch and then eat the seeds. Grow dandelions, feed siskins.

After we bought our Dexter cows and began grazing them in tiny paddocks we noticed something very strange.

I thought then of Aiden, standing in his droopy pajamas, holding his bunny, asking Daddy for "mo hug" before he goes off to school each morning. When do you *stop* hugging them? Kissing them? Holding them? If we knew the hour, the day, the minute we'd lose each other, would we ever let go?

The pastor spoke to a crowded church, and the eulogy was read, the one written by the parents themselves, and in it, my friend – the mother of this girl who had a rare genetic disorder – talked about not being able to breathe when the doctors gave her the final diagnosis.

Her daughter hadn't eaten in days, hadn't really woken in weeks, and her kidneys were shutting down. All this mother could do was hold onto her baby girl and worry about such a tiny person going to such a big place like heaven.

"I wondered if she would get lost; I wished I could be there to help her find her way around. Heaven is such a big place, and she is such a little girl..."

I couldn't find enough Kleenex for the faith of this beautiful woman who, while losing her child, worried solely for her well-being in the after-life. Worried only about her finding her way to Jesus. There was no anger, no rage, no banging hands against cedar casket. Just the empty womb of a mother who'd given birth to an angel.

Oh, that we might all help our children find their way to Jesus. >

Please visit Emily's website at emilywierenga.com for more info.



PHOTO CREDITS: CURT GESCH

After carefully establishing a pasture of orchard grass, timothy, white and red clovers and birds-foot trefoil, we turned in the cows and they checked out the borders of the enclosure (as cows and schoolchildren are wont to do) and then moved from plant to plant, eating first dandelion flowers and stalks, then the basal leaves. Only after the field was scalped of dandelions did the Dexters move on to the recommended grasses and forbs.

It has become something of an evening tradition that my wife and I turn the cows into a new paddock and then stand there listening to the *pop, snap, pop* of hollow dandelion stems being ripped off and crunched up by our appreciative cows. They seem to thrive on the weeds as much as the "plants." In fact, Cow, Patty, Liko and Cupcake remind me of the seven fat "kine" of Pharaoh's dream.

This has led us to dedicate a part of our yard to dandelions and grass. We fence the cows into a small section of our yard and let them graze. Dandelions first, and then – each in its turn – the grasses and clovers. Leftover dandelions go to seed and become a pine siskin refuge (*see photo*).

I wouldn't plant dandelions, and I still mutter imprecations at them as they sprout up in my perennial beds and asparagus patch, but I have come to appreciate them as a fellow immigrant from the Old World that has found a way to contribute to the New. >

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) lives in Quick, B.C. He says that the collective noun for a group of chickadees *really* is "banditry." He knows because it said so on the computer.

Reviews



Bear Creek
by Brandi Carlile
2012 Columbia Records

Rebellion and grace in *Bear Creek*

Walter Miedema

Life teaches us lessons. Not all of them are easily learned. As human beings we're stubborn and we persist in doing things the hard way. Brandi Carlile's latest album *Bear Creek* lives, and sometimes revels in the rebelliousness of learning from the school of hard knocks.

Bear Creek, which was released on June 5, is Carlile's fourth studio album and reveals a confident maturity in her talents as a songwriter and a performer that builds on the fantastic arrival of her previous studio album *Give up the Ghost*. The album is named for the studio where the album

was recorded and its nearby namesake watercourse. *Bear Creek* covers familiar, rebellious territory that has always been present in Carlile's music.

Bear Creek's journey begins with a driving anthem that is infused with all the sounds of a steam engine. The voices of Carlile's back up singers and writing partners, twins Phil and Tim Hanseroth, become the whistle calling us to climb aboard while the drums are pushed into a chugging steam driven rhythm by Allison Miller. This opening song, titled "Hard Way Home," sets a mood and a theme for the album. The song's narrator clearly regrets some of the choices that she has made but can't see how things could have been any other way. There are hopes for an easier life, but in reality, that doesn't seem possible.



That in essence is the theme of this album. Life is a struggle and one must work hard at making it worth living. People make mistakes but in all there are bright lights and good memories to be found. I'm not exactly sure of Carlile's religious leanings but in the past her music has alluded to Baptist roots. While direct mention of this is not made in her music, Carlile is also a lesbian. The struggle to reconcile her religious roots and her sexuality suggest

a possible partial source of inspiration for the angst and tension expressed in her lyrics.

Carlile's music is rebellious in many ways, and at times comparable in mood to a young Johnny Cash. It is, however, for the most part a positive rebellion, albeit one that may suffer from its overzealousness yet refuses to become jaded by the struggles it expresses. "Keep Your Heart Young," the album's fifth song, embodies this positive rebelliousness by asserting "don't trade in your Tic Tac box for a ball at the end of the chain / And don't go spending grandpa's pennies buying into the game." Later she sings, "pack your snowballs a little less tight but in the middle still put rocks." This suggests a tempered rebellion that recognizes its own cynicism but still sees the need to take aim at questionable assertions that society generally accepts. The album's second song, "Raise Hell," flows in this vein as well.

The phrase "amazing grace" makes its way into two of the songs. In the lines of "In the Morrow" the grace takes the form of poise that comes from self discovery: "I took my cross up and walked away / With amazing grace and open eyes / Even though I'm born to lose my way." The song comes across as a resigned admission of the failure of a long term relationship but also remarks, "Don't we always find a way to carry on."

The other appearance of "amazing grace" is in the album's first single, "That Wasn't Me." In this song Carlile sings "To be wrong and admit is not amazing grace." The use of amazing grace appears to have a double meaning here. The sense used in "In the Morrow" is present, but it also implies grace received despite unworthiness. The song's narrator is, "[t]o be loved like a song you remember even when you've changed" This suggests that grace goes through to the heart of a person that seeks to change. The song expresses the sentiment found in the apostle Paul's classic lament in Romans 7 ("For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.") The song first lists the mistakes the narrator has made and then claims "that wasn't me." The end of the song repeats this same structure but instead enumerates the actions the narrator wants to do and affirms four times, "that will be me." There's a determination here that seems to be suspicious of the "amazing grace" being asked for but the song's plaintive tone remains hopeful.

Another highlight of the album is the beautifully orchestrated and harmonized "Just Kids" that closes the album. This song, with its reference to Seattle, is the most transparently autobiographical on the album. The song speaks of a longing for a person who can be an anchor in one's life. I have a suspicion this feeling is inspired by Carlile's mother but I can't be totally sure. There's an element of apology and an element of thanks here but it's subtle and not overt. A gentle coming home perhaps. It's a perfect fade out for the album.

Walter Miedema (walter.p.miedema@gmail.com) is pursuing a Master of Library and Information Science at the University of Western Ontario. For the time being, he lives in London, and writes in his spare time.



Moonrise Kingdom transports viewers to a strange, but wonder-filled place

Bruce Soderholm



Moonrise Kingdom

directed by Wes Anderson
American Imperial Pictures, 2012

lovers separated by circumstance. Likewise, *Moonrise Kingdom*'s title evokes for the audience a magical place not so different from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where runaway lovers and those giving chase, provide much comic entertainment.

The storyline entails two budding adolescents, Sam Shakusky (Jared Gilman) – an orphaned Khaki Scout – and Suzy Bishop (Kara Hayward) – a watchful, savvy, and yet troubled girl – who find in each other kindred spirits. Having met a year earlier on the site of a church musical production, *Noye's Fludde* (Noah's Flood), a pen pal relationship ensues and elicits a scheme to run away together – for Suzy, away from her dysfunctional parents (played by Bill Murray and Frances McDormand), and for Sam, away from his scout troop which is an awkward surrogate family not much better than his foster home. Their disappearance sets in motion an effort to locate them, and presses into service the scouting communities present on the island in aid of the island's lone policeman.

Scout Master Ward (Edward Norton – masterfully cast), is the one who discovers that the skilled, but unpopular Sam, has fled camp during the night. While Sam is extremely competent in scouting disciplines, the world of the Khaki Scouts is one which thrives on conformity, and it is this world which Sam longs to escape.

The soarch-party scouts provide a comic take on police dragnets complete with hard-nosed tactics ("I won't be caught without a weapon"). Harvey Keitel makes a cameo as the scout arch-commander whose intransigence is contrasted against the humane and caring Scout Master Ward. Jason Schwartzman, a perennial Anderson favourite, plays Cousin Ben, a sympathetic and comically counter-cultural abettor to the adolescents in flight. Yet another superior casting choice is Tilda Swinton as the hilariously named *Social Services*, whose whey-faced and cold-fish demeanour perfectly embodies soulless bureaucracy.

As for the young fugitive couple, life on the lam is mostly idyllic, though friction occasionally arises. After being tracked by the lone island police presence, Captain Sharpe (Bruce Willis), and the Khaki Scouts, Sam and Suzy elude one capture attempt, but inevitably succumb to a later effort before escaping yet once again.

The pacing of the film is, for the most part, quite effective. An intriguing back-story is inserted where it's most needed, and the burgeoning conflict and dramatic climax is intimately tied to a massive storm bearing down on the island.

Wes Anderson is an auteur whose films (e.g. *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*) are an acquired taste for some. Well known for his hyperbolic humour and postmodern sensibility, he often seems more intent on exhibiting cleverness than telling a compelling story. His characters look directly at the camera at times as though aware of the film audience, and in *Moonrise Kingdom*, he even provides an eccentric island character (Bob Balaban) to serve as narrator, doling out some helpful, but generally superfluous, information.

In Anderson's films, it's not unusual to be held at a distance from his main characters who often appear more as caricatures than anything else. The good news is that while *Moonrise Kingdom*, which opened this year's Cannes Film Festival, retains all of the signature Anderson quirkiness, the central characters (Sam and Suzy) are ones who we care about and root for. To boot, the film's ending provides a resolution appropriate for the story's overall context and genre.

Atypically, the film was shot entirely in 16mm – a format which creates a deliberately unpolished look and feel, yet one that manages to capture the 1960s era with a home-movie look. Likewise, the soundtrack evokes a '60s nostalgia with its prominent featuring of Benjamin Britten's, *A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.

The rigidly structured classical music, alongside the boxy dollhouse appearance of Suzy's family home and the endless uniformity of the Khaki Scouts' campsites and routines, together represent a structured and unbending world in which those who think outside the box and don't fit in, like Sam and Suzy, are forced to flee in order to retain their individuality. Fortunately, not all the film's authority figures are devoid of humane impulses and the film's resolution suggests that there is room for grace within rigid systems, and that chaos is not the only alternative to unyielding societal structure.

Bruce Soderholm (brucesoderholm@cogeco.ca) is an educator and freelance writer who lives in St. Catharines, Ont. He has written on the arts and entertainment beat for a number of years, and writes regularly on the subject of film.



Contest

Christian Courier is delighted to announce the winners of the **Third Annual Children's Short Story Contest**. The finalists were judged by Angela Reitsma Bick, editor, Nick Schuurman, review editor and Cathy Smith, features editor. We congratulate Esther van der Woerd, 14, our Intermediate Category winner, and Elise Schwarz, 10, our Junior Category winner, both of whom will receive a \$50 gift certificate from Toys R' Us. Esther's story offers a tight structure and a sensitive window into a family's grief. The simplicity and authenticity of faith in the story is rendered with a light touch and observant details establish a believable sense of place. Elise's story shines with a nicely-rounded plot, a believable and likable main character and a lovely naturalness of tone. The honourable mentions, also featured in this issue, demonstrate similarly mature writing and strong imagination. Truly, all the stories we received were of commendable calibre. The participants should be proud of their efforts! *Cathy Smith, Features Ed.*

Winner – Intermediate Category

Greater

Esther van der Woerd

I ran out the back door, leaving it swinging behind me, down the hill and flung myself on the ground by the creek, under the protection of our willow tree's long tresses. I tugged the elastic out of my short tidy braid, my hair falling on my face as I leaned into my knees. The calm, quiet air soothed me and I took in a delicious breath of fresh air. I don't know how long I sat there, relishing the quiet solitude. Away from them all. The stuffy room, filled with the stench of pity and the agonizing sighs of sympathy. Dad's empty eyes. Little Jillian's confused questions. Finn trying to stand tall and strong for all of us. The fake, pasty smiles of people we hardly know, trying to make sense of our pain. It was just wrong. All of it. I wiped my eyes on my black skirt, careful not to wrinkle my stiff white blouse. Yes, today we had to appear proper and neat for the final goodbye. Slowly they would all leave, and we would remain, standing stiff and cold, uncomfortable in our own house.

In the shade of the willow, the soft wind fluttering around me, I recalled the day's events. The funeral had gone by slowly, I had struggled to remain solemn and still, an aching pain gnawing at my heart. I held firmly on to Jillian's small chubby hand, her chin trembling as they lowered Mom's coffin into the ground, with an echoing finality. Finn stood on my left, his face cast downward, in a vacant expression, hands clasped in firm determination. My hand found his and there we stood, three chil-

dren side by side, eyes following the coffin as it went down into its warm earthy bed where it would remain, forever.

A floating lily caught my eye as it traveled gently down the creek's path, weaving through rocks and dips in the water. I stood, brushed my hands free of dirt and walked slowly back to the house. I ducked my head as I entered through the back door, the cool wood floors greeting my eyes, everyone had gone. Perhaps they had grown tired of sitting in depressing silence, or perhaps I had been out longer than I thought.

We went through the motions. Thaw another frozen pizza, set the table exactly the way Mom had taught us, sit down, eat and go to our rooms. We used to sit in the living room after dinner, all together, before cancer took Mom away. We would sit there, doing homework, reading, playing a game, or maybe chatting. Mom would sit in her chair, the comfy one with a smooth velvet surface, sipping her tea, and her pleasant laugh would ring loudest. I guess when cancer took her away from home it was too hard to sit there, staring at Mom's empty chair and wondering about the future that we knew we could never control.

I walked up the stairs, kicking off my black Sunday shoes and taking my time in my room changing out of my clothes, pulling a big sweatshirt over my head, and



slipping on warm pajama pants. I pulled Jillian into the bathroom, watching her brush her teeth, and I combed out her hair before braiding it back. Just the way Mom had always done. I carried her to her bedroom, her eyelids heavy with tiredness as I tucked her under the covers, safe. I turned to leave when I heard her small voice, drowsy with sleep.

"Lea, you forgot to pray."

I stood still in the dark, my feelings in conflict. Mom had always prayed, it was something we had grown up doing. But, personally I didn't see the point, Mom died anyway, even after I sat in bed crying to God all those nights. He must not have cared enough to help our small family. I just didn't think I could trust this God, I was obviously not important enough to be heard by him.

I walked back over to Jillian's bed and sat on the corner, my hand on her back and my voice in a whisper, "Dear God, thank you for the food you give us, all those we love and the love you show us." I rattled off the usual prayer, but this time it had an odd effect on me, like it never had before. I felt tears streaming down my face, and big, gulped sobs choked my throat. Jillian sat up scared, her small hands went to my face, stroking my hair like Mom used to do when we were upset. It was as if a

dam broke and the tears held back for so long surged uncontrollably. "Why did you leave us God? Why!" my heart screamed. I didn't notice the door open, but suddenly Finn was there, crying softly as he wrapped his protective arms around us, holding us close as we let our tears run dry. We all lay down, Finn snuggling Jillian, my head on his back.

"God, please be with us, especially now when it's hard to understand.... Help us stay strong and help us have faith," Finn's voice broke the silence, followed by little Jillian's.

"Dear God, please help us not be sad and please help Daddy." She went quiet, burying her face against Finn's arm.

I added, "God, you know how difficult this is for us. I pray that you will give us the courage to trust you and the faith that you will help us through even this. Amen."

I felt it then. A pang of peace and safety, as if our world might be okay again one day, just enough hope for me to hang onto as I fell asleep. And for the first night in months, I slept soundly, held in the shelter of his loving hand, a place where I found a love so much greater than I had ever known.

Esther is 14 and just graduated from Trinity Christian School in Burlington. She will be attending Hamilton District Christian High School in the fall. She enjoys writing, sports, music and drama.



Winner – Junior Category

Frank learns to love again

Elise Schwarz

It was a cold winter morning. Frank Evangelista, a stubborn old man who hardly smiled anymore, was sitting in his green chair drinking coffee. He was thinking about his wife, Sarah, and how much he missed her since she had died.

After he finished his coffee, he put on his winter coat and went for a walk. He walked past his neighbours' houses one by one. When he was halfway around the block in Little Italy, he saw the sign for the New York City Pound. He could hear dogs yelping.

"I should really go and see that pound," he said to himself. "I've lived here all my life and never been inside."

When Frank opened the door of the pound, he saw a sign that said WE ONLY KEEP DOGS FOR SIX WEEKS. Frank



looked at the sign angrily. Six weeks! What happened after that?

He entered and saw a woman sitting behind a desk.

"I want to look at the dogs."

"Okay, right this way." She showed him to a room filled with dogs. Frank paced around the room, looking at the dogs. There

were small ones, large ones, long and short-haired, many different colours and breeds. They barked noisily for his attention. The woman was standing in a corner watching him.

He walked past a cute small dog.

"That's Plato," she said.

"Playdough?" he asked in confusion. "My grandchildren play with that."

"No, Plato, as in the philosopher," the woman answered, fiddling with Plato's cage latch.

"Oh," Frank answered, wondering how the little dog had earned his name. He looked at Plato for a long time. "I'm done here," Frank said as he left the room. He went out the door and headed for home, relieved to be away from all the yelping dogs and yet feeling troubled.

Meanwhile, at the pound, Plato whined

when the man and woman left. He whined again and pushed his nose against the door of his cage, where the woman had fiddled with the latch. It moved and creaked a little bit.

He stuck his paw out of one of the bars and pressed at the latch. It opened! Plato jumped down and pushed the door open. He sneaked past the woman behind the desk and pushed the front door open. He was free! It had been weeks since he had been outside and the cold almost overwhelmed him. Then he began to sniff the sidewalk carefully, trying to pick up the scent of the old man. He sniffed around Frank's neighbourhood for hours.

Suddenly, Plato smelled something familiar and ran ahead down the street and then up a walkway to a small house. He went up to the door and scratched.

See Frank on p. 12

Contest

Honourable Mention – Intermediate Category

The diary of Susanna Peterson

Rachel Boone

Monday, September 10, 1869

Yesterday Mama came to me while I was digging potatoes in the garden. She brought me this pale blue notebook.

"Record your adventures in here, Susanna," she said to me. "I thought that you might like to write about us moving west – that way we will always remember."

So I am starting right now, as we prepare for our big adventure. The whole house is in a flurry of activity because Papa will be home from Harland soon with the supplies for our journey. Mama is dashing around packing all of our belongings into wooden crates.

Tomorrow is when we pack up our covered wagon for our month-long trip to the West.

Tuesday, September 11, 1869

We are almost ready! The wagon is packed and ready to go. I didn't think that it was possible to fit so much into one covered wagon as we have!

I am sitting here in the hayloft one last time. From where I sit, I can see Mama working hard to get the last of the vegetables out of the garden and into crates, not that there were very many to begin with. I can also see Papa walking through the field. He keeps stopping to let the dry, brown dirt sift through his fingers and to pick a dead, withered plant. Who would have guessed when we planted all of our grains and vegetables in the spring that there would be no rain, and we would have nothing to harvest in the fall?

Papa arrived back from Harland late last night. I was in bed, but I awoke when I heard the wagon coming and I ran out to meet him.

Oh, you'll never believe all of the good things he brought us! There are several crates full of fresh oranges and pears, new clothes for all of us (including a beautiful red dress for me), canned foods, pots and pans, and a milk cow. The milk cow, whom we have already named Pansy, is going to be tied to the back of the wagon so that we can have fresh milk each day.

But my favorite thing of all is something that Papa brought back just for me. Last night, when I went out to meet him, he didn't greet me with a hug. Instead, he put his hand inside his jacket and, with a grin, pulled out a little squirming bundle that he handed to me. It was little brown and white puppy!

"I thought that with five brothers, you might want a little bit of other companionship on our trip west," he told me. He's right. My five brothers – Matt, David, Will, Samuel and Micah – prefer each other's company more than mine, so I am often left alone.

"So... he's mine?" I asked in amazement, cuddling the puppy.

"All yours. He doesn't even have a name yet. I thought that I would leave that up to you," said Papa. I named him Jack. He is fast asleep, curled up on my lap right now. I am going to bring him with us when we leave early tomorrow morning.

Wednesday, September 12, 1869

Our adventure has begun!

We left just as the sun was rising this morning and we have made good progress. The landscape has changed a lot since we left. The land is more flat, there are less trees, and it gets more and more dry the farther we go. I hope that Papa knows what we're doing! After all, we are moving west because it is supposed to be less dry than it was where we used to live.



My only regret so far is that we didn't bring our feather pillows to sit on. Every bump and rut in the trail makes our wagon jerk painfully. I am sitting in the covered part of our wagon on Mama and Papa's makeshift bed, in an effort to rest my

aching bones. Also crowded onto this bed with me are four of my brothers, Jack, and several crates.

It has been about six or seven hours since we left home. Oh, I must stop thinking of it as home! Home is where we're going, not what we've left behind. I didn't realize when we left early this morning that I would miss everything so much – the rolling hills, our big, spacious house, the old barn, and the creek that ran through our backyard.

Papa and Mama are sitting up in the front of the wagon, talking softly about what our lives will be like once we get to the West and start a ranch there. Papa's ideas are full of hope. He says that there is plenty of good land, and that never before has there been a farmer who was disappointed with a dry crop there. Mama doesn't sound so sure.

Soon we will stop and stretch our legs. What a relief that will be!

Friday, September 14, 1869

This is our third day on the trail. I think that we all have become accustomed to it by now, although my body still aches more and more with every jolt of the wagon. It doesn't seem to bother my brothers as much as it bothers me.

I would write more, but I'm tired and my bed looks very inviting right now!

Saturday, September 15, 1869

Early this morning, before anyone else was awake yet, I got up quietly and went outside. I filled a pail with Pansy's milk, and then I went for a short walk away from the wagon with Jack nipping playfully at my heels.

As I walked, I realized that already I have learned to love this land. I love the flat plains and the swaying yellow grass. I love the brilliant colors of the wildflowers and of the sunrise. I love travelling through this land each day. But most of all, I love how this land is giving my family a second chance – the chance to start over.

Rachel is looking forward to entering Grade nine this fall. She enjoys spending time with her four siblings and writing.



Honourable Mention – Junior Category

Peanuts

Suzanna Winter

A nine-year-old girl named Emily visited the circus by herself. She was supposed to do a project for school on animals. She looked at the tigers, llamas, ostriches and monkeys. Right by the monkey cage, she saw a monkey trying to pick something up off of the ground. It was a penny. Emily picked it up and put it in her pocket.

She kept looking at other animals, trying to find the right one to do her project on. Then, she saw the elephants and ran over to their cage. She had always loved elephants. One elephant came over to where Emily stood, and stood close to the fencing. She was grey and wrinkled and had bristly hair on her body. The elephant was very chubby as well. Her curious trunk reached out and moved over Emily's clothes and tugged gently on her hair. Emily laughed because it tickled.

The elephant's little brown eyes seemed to be asking Emily for something. Emily saw a sign that said she was for sale for one cent. So she bought the elephant and brought her home with her, for she was gentle and very easy to lead, in spite of how big she was.

When her dad saw the elephant, he cried, "No, no, no, NO!"

And she said, "But Daddy, I have to do a project and so I am gonna do it on this elephant."

Her dad said, "OK, you can keep the elephant until you're done the project."

Emily and her parents lived on a horse-breeding farm and there was an empty foaling stall available in the barn. There was lots of extra hay because there had been excellent haying weather the year before. Emily decided to name her elephant Ellie, and took care of her each day before and after school. Emily found out that Ellie loved to eat peanuts, and to be scratched on her back with a curry comb from the horses.

Emily decided that she was never going to do the project, so that she could keep the elephant forever.

Then one day, her mom called, "Emily!" so she came to her mom. Her mom said, "I just got an email that you have a project due tomorrow! Have you done it yet?"

Emily said, "No."

When her mother asked why not, Emily said, "Because I wanted to keep Ellie."

Her mom told her to go and do her project. Emily argued back, "But Dad said that when I am done my project, I have to find a new home for Ellie. Before I do my project, we have to make Dad promise that I can keep her."

So, they went and talked to her dad, and he said, "But I told you, the elephant can stay until you are done the project. I need to talk this over with your mom. Why don't you go out and play for a few minutes?"

Emily went out to the barn planning to give Ellie some peanuts and scratch her back for a while. When she got there, she found a surprise! Ellie had a tiny, newborn calf with her! The calf was so small that it was about chest height on Emily.

"Oh, wow! That was why you were so fat! Maybe that is why you were for sale – your owners didn't want your baby," Emily said.

She watched Ellie and her calf for a little bit, but then ran to the house, yelling for her mom and dad. They came running out of the house, wondering what the matter was. Emily told them, "Ellie had a baby! We have to keep her until the calf is old enough to take care of herself."

Her parents didn't believe her and had to come and see for themselves. Then her dad told her that her parents had decided to talk to the Storytime Zoo which was close to their house, and see if Ellie could go there.

When the zoo found out that Ellie and her calf needed a home, they said that they would love to have her. Emily named the calf Peanuts, after Ellie's favourite food. Emily was a little sad to see Ellie and Peanuts leave, but the zoo gave her a free pass so that she could come and visit them whenever she wanted.

Suzanna is a 10-year-old who has a knack with animals. In addition to training her German Shepherd Dog "Coal von Narnia BH," she volunteers weekly at a neighbour's horse farm. She hasn't trained any elephants... yet.



Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



I didn't want to be our church's bulletin editor, ignoring for months the repeated pleas, and even urgent prayers from the pulpit, for someone to step forward. Shame on me. I had my reasons, I thought.

I'd recently retired from teaching only to be recruited for painting at our church, drama and art workshops, committee work, judging science fairs and writing contests and more. In my journal I groused, "I feel like I'm in the same place I was when I was working, for crying out loud, pulled in a hundred directions.... I want to pray that someone will step up and do the bulletin, so I don't have to. But, Lord, I'll do it if somehow you make it clear to me that that's what I should do." (Thus, take note. Here follows a cautionary tale. If, like Gideon and me, you say you want a sign, God will take you at your word). An elder asked me point-blank to be the bulletin editor, just temporarily. I ended up doing it for three and a half years.

There's a moral here, or maybe several. Sheepishly, I discovered I liked doing the work. I could do it on my own time, at home. Everyone was so appreciative! I felt the love as a bulletin editor far more than I ever did as a catechism teacher. (That's a cautionary tale for another time.) Doing such a "visible" task also spared me from various and sundry other jobs.

I found that God could be served in the

True bulletin confessions

details, even in mundane clerical details. As I began fleshing out that revelation, it brought surprising satisfaction. I could enhance announcements, crafting phrases to build community. Abrupt reminders about meetings on scraps of paper or curt messages left on my answering machine could be gentled to be more welcoming and gracious. Inserting a few extra "please and thank yous" gave the bulletin a more courteous tone. The "congregation" became "our church family." A note from the deacons became a note from "your" deacons, reminding us that their diaconal work is done on our behalf. Some announcements simply needed a smiley face. Some needed to be revised for inclusivity. Who can say if these tiny edits contributed anything at all to enrich our church's fellowship? But I like to think so. I like to think that our God is so big that even the most minute details, offered in his service, find their place in the coming of the kingdom.

Around God's house

I took photos of our church family, adding them to the bulletin under the heading *Around God's House*. Random shots of Sunday school kids with palm branches, teens slouched in the front lobby and old guys peeling potatoes served to put a face on the "communion of the saints." I wanted to show the congregation to itself: see how diverse you are, see your service to one another, see how lovely you are dwelling together in God's house! ~

But it wasn't just what I was doing to the bulletin, it was what the bulletin was doing to me. Putting it together on Thursday drew Sunday closer, the sermon titles, hymn numbers and upcoming sacraments inhabiting the forefront of my consciousness, calling like "silver trumpets" to "holy convocations" as the old hymn has it. The church was getting "in my face" with cheek-pinching affection, like a doting mom or grandma, brooking no resistance.

I began to pray more often, spontaneously, for my church. I found myself loving the people of my church with uncommon tenderness. Week after week I typed the names of brothers and sisters in the Lord needing prayer in their struggles – illnesses, sorrows, losses. Week after week I typed the names of those same brothers and sisters praising God for his mercies "new every morning," healings and recoveries, weddings and anniversaries, the birth of children and grandchildren. I typed the names of members celebrating birthdays in the upcoming week. I logged dozens of emails weekly from the pastor, the clerk, the deacons, the head counsellors of GEMS and Cadets, the leaders of Coffee Break and VBS. Week after week I saw God dot-matrixed, duplicated and folded 150 times. God – all over every bulletin.

When I put the weekly CRC-Newsletter into the mail slots, again, I would find myself praying, moved by the sheer number of denominational ministries and events streaming live to my local church from

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everywhere. All those missionaries and pastors and laypeople proclaiming and conferencing and teaching and learning! All that money raised by the CRWRC for Haiti and Japan! A bi-national church, a global presence! And, in the basement of the Wyoming CRC, the Holy Spirit breathing renewed servanthood into my depleted grudging spirit, refilling my empty wine-skin as I photocopied and stuffed mail slots in my own dry and thirsty little corner.

Say it with me: *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God....*

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Frank...continued from p. 10

No one answered. It was the middle of the night and Frank Evangelista was inside, fast asleep. Plato knew the smell was right and scratched again. No answer! When the little dog thought things were hopeless, he curled up in a ball and went to sleep.

When Plato saw the sun rise the next morning, he got up and waited for Frank to come out. Frank was inside, brewing his morning coffee. He sat in his green chair to drink his coffee and then went out his side door for a walk. He didn't see Plato on the front step. Once Frank reached the sidewalk, Plato quietly followed behind. When he got right behind Frank, Plato started walking on his hind legs, trying to impress Frank. Frank didn't notice until Plato barked. Frank turned to see the dog "walking" behind him.

"What are you doing, mutt?" Frank shouted. "Don't you have an owner?" Frank looked at the dog closely. He didn't have a collar and he looked familiar.

"Hey, you're Playdough or Plato, aren't you?" Frank stated, "What are you doing here? Shoo!" Plato backed up a few steps.

Then Frank continued on his walk, without a care in the world. About half a

block later, he looked back and realized Plato was still there. "If you're not going to leave, then I'll make you." He turned in the direction of the pound. Plato followed, not knowing where he was going.

When they reached the pound, Frank carried the small dog in and said sharply to the woman, "This is your dog, Playdough. I found him disturbing my morning walk." He gave Plato to the woman and walked away.

"It's Plato, not Playdough," the woman corrected.

"Same thing," he grumbled as he went out the door.

Frank walked home, slowly and silently. For the rest of the day, he sat in front of the TV, not watching anything.

At the pound, the woman put Plato back in his cage. The little dog's head drooped and he whined softly when the cage closed.

At home, Frank brushed his teeth and got into bed. He lay awake, thinking. He admitted to himself that he regretted



taking Plato back to the pound. "Maybe I would enjoy the company," he thought. He considered the idea for a long time and

made a decision. Tomorrow he would get the dog. Finally, he would have company in his loneliness without Sarah.

The next day, Frank got up early and got dressed. He gulped down breakfast and drove to the pound. At the pound, Frank said to the woman, "I want Plato." He spoke quickly, almost as if he was concerned.

"OK, I'll get him," replied the woman. She opened the cage and carried Plato out. She handed him to Frank. Plato wiggled happily in Frank's arms and licked his face. Frank frowned at first, and pretended to be upset. But then a grin spread across his face.

"You're mine now. You're my only friend," said Frank happily. He knew at that moment, his dear Sarah would be smiling.

Elise Schwarz was 10 years old when she wrote this story. She is 11 now and headed for Grade six in September at Trinity Christian School in Burlington, Ont. She loves reading and writing, playing the piano and taking dance at Burlington Dance Academy.



Columns

Our World Today

Bert Huelma



On a hotter than usual day for early June I was running on the Bruce trail in a cool tunnel of green growth. Tiny sun-spots made the dark path resemble a star-studded sky. I was thinking.

Physical exertion always lubricates my brain. My mind was busy with climate change, visualizing Eve and Adam at that tree, full with good fruit. I imagined them absorbing that bitter bite, and experiencing a world-altering event: climate change. They needed clothes not only because their thoughts had taken an erotic twist but also because flies, mosquitoes, bees, formerly solely agents of pollination, were stinging them all over.

Climate change is more than temperatures rising. It also causes cancers and withholds wisdom, evident especially in political, ecclesiastical and financial circles. Take perpetual growth. Every day we hear economists and politicians laud its miraculous merits in unison, as if constant repetition will make it come true and thereby lower deficits and create greater prosperity.

But perpetual growth is impossible. These same people in essence deny climate change, which necessitates fundamental changes since motor vehicles and all industrialization generate CO₂, the hot weather maker.

I was there when climate change was debated at the Christian Reformed Church

Does the church still remember *semper reformanda*?

Church services would be more effective if pastors led walks in the woods.

synod. It was a fascinating U.S. Congress-resembling scenario. In other words I heard a lot of nonsense. The proposal passed with a reluctant majority: one vote on a minor matter went 98-68, a 40 percent disapproval. Earlier I had attended a combined delegate and young adult service. The singing there was interspersed with Bible readings and a quote from the Belgic Confession: "We know God *first* by the Creation, as the universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book," which is based on Romans 1:20 where it says that contemplating our wonderful world alone should convict us of God's eternal power and divine nature. Believe it or not, Creation is God's holy primary word.

Once the communal part was over, the audience was asked to form small prayer circles. In my group were some important

movers of the denomination. When I suggested that, based on what we all just had recited, Creation too is God's holy word, this was met with stony silence. Even though the Bible and our songs – "This is my Father's world" – state that God made the cosmos which makes it holy, it's much easier to ignore that part because it entails a drastic reversal of our daily doings. Because it requires constant forgiveness for driving a car or even switching on a light, which cause pollution.

Still capable?

Will the church ever make God's holy primary Creation-word an active part of the liturgy? Liturgy literally means "the work of the people." Has *semper reformanda* become an empty slogan? Is the church still capable of "always reforming?" I love the church. I am often moved to tears by the singing and praying (I am an emotional sob). By and large the sermons, based on God's secondary Word, are mainly monologues of which only 10 percent is retained. Church services would be far more effective if the original meaning of liturgy was implemented, if preachers were to act as coaches to involve people, elicit testimonies, help share practical energy-savings, food-growing tips and walks in the woods to learn about God's created word. With direct participation the learning index increases to 90 percent.

As a Christian community, in the prelude

to the Lord's return, we must unflinchingly face the current situation and integrate scriptural insight with cosmic concerns. We must use the Bible as a lamp for our feet while becoming much more knowledgeable about creation, God's ever valid direct Word.

Frankly I don't think church denominations can still change. At the CRC Synod I noticed that many are still caught up in the Greek philosophy of nature and grace, where the church is in the soul business and has nothing to do with stuff out there. It seems to me that changes are up to clusters of people – "where two or three are together" – or perhaps a "small is beautiful" congregation.

Reforming means a radical departure from the centuries-old format of church services, which is losing appeal everywhere. Reforming means implementing what 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us: "When we are in Christ the old has gone, the new has come." That new is outlined in Revelation 21 which reveals a new Creation – God's holy primary Word – without a temple or church or synagogue or Bible. I believe that we slowly must move that way, especially for the sake of the young people, many of whom no longer feel at home with the current setup. When we dare to worship in an integrated way, they will remain with us and even teach us a thing or two.

Bert Huelma lives in Tweed, Ont., 200 km from both Toronto and Ottawa.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



A month ago, my wife and daughter were in an elevator and a complete stranger looked at our two and a half year old and asked, "What's your name?" Our daughter proclaimed "Phoebe!" The woman went on to say, "Now aren't you the cutest thing, you have beautiful hair." Our daughter responded by saying "I'm fabulous!"

We've all heard many pastors and leaders share stories from experiences with their children. Before having a child, I couldn't possibly imagine the many experiences with our children that would impact me so much that I would use them as illustrations.

This story about Phoebe is short. The whole conversation was under a minute, but it has life application written all over it and I have already used it a few times when sharing aspects of God's love and character.

I'm in the process of reading the book *Who's Your Daddy?* by Waylon Ward. As a father, I am very much interested in gaining more perspective and knowledge of my Father God. To be honest, I don't think that we will ever grasp even a sliver of what

Are you fabulous?

we want to know about the Father Heart of God, this side of heaven, but I do know that a lot of it comes from our own experiences with our earthly fathers as well as our own experiences being fathers.

When Phoebe responded by saying she is fabulous, I wondered if I view myself as fabulous? Not in a conceited or vain way, but in the eyes of my heavenly Father I am fabulous. He takes delight in me and rejoices over me with singing (Zephaniah 3:17), but do I deep down know my worth and value to him? Too often I view myself through negative concepts about myself, which can often lead me to stay paralyzed in fear, unable to step out and into all that God is calling me to do. To use the creative and musical talents that he gave me for his glory.

Giving God joy

At a recent conference I met with someone who wanted some prayer ministry. This person confessed that he has a really great singing voice but felt stunted in being able to use this gift because he felt as if people would view him differently because of his great voice. Immediately I felt as if God was saying to this young man that he was

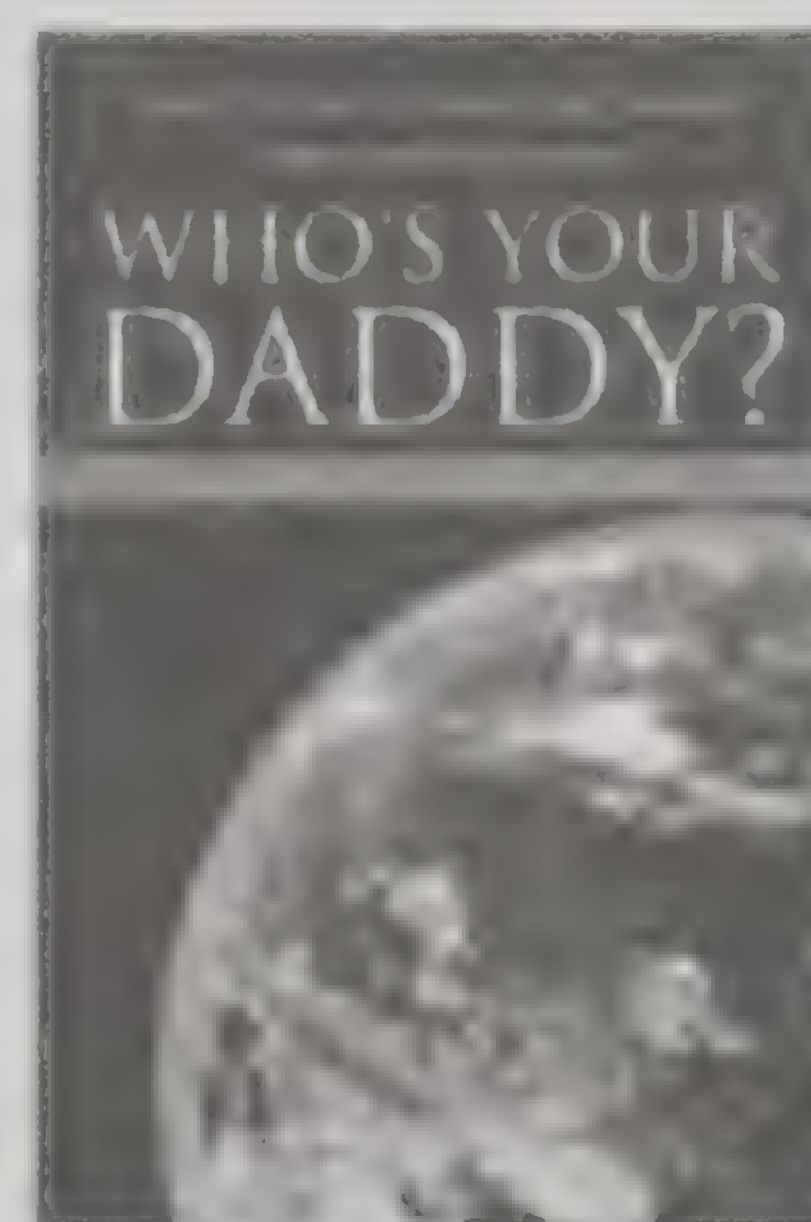
fabulous. That God even wanted him to say that he was fabulous. Stepping out into the fullness of our gifts and talents must give God such joy. I know that when my daughter dances or sings, my heart leaps with joy. I can't get enough of that from her. I applaud her, dance with her and sing loudly with her, even if she doesn't get it all right or if she falls down or trips while she dances. I just pick her up and she begins again.

How many of us stay paralyzed on the ground or rooted in shame because of what we fear others might say or think if we make a mistake and aren't perfect? How many of our talents and gifts lay silently still while we only hope that maybe one day we can use them?

For myself, I knew I had a gift to play piano and sing. I grew up singing in choirs and playing piano in the safety of our home or at a musical festival. As an adult, even though I have these gifts, I was definitely

afraid to use them outside the home. My view was that other people were way more talented than me, so why step out and use these gifts? Yet I longed to. I thought I was being humble in my recognition of my own limitations when really I had a fear of man, a fear of making a mistake and a fear of looking foolish. I'm learning to step out, because I understand a bit more about who's my daddy. It's been challenging, but more than anything it has been freeing to step out in talents that I love but for so many years have felt inadequate to use because I compared myself to others.

If I view my daughter as fabulous, what would my perfectly loving and amazing Heavenly Daddy say about me or about you? I'm learning that he says I am fabulous and that it's okay to even use that word when I think of the gifts that he has given me.



Kenny Warkentin (kennyp66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg.

Features

Tattoos and the long game

Brent van Staalduinen

Summer, 1993

I'm standing in front of a dingy storefront on Toronto's Queen Street. The place is exactly as it had been described: filthy windows, cracked paint, trembling neon sign, heavy metal music tinny away on weak speakers. Greasy people.

I ask myself if I really want to go through with it. I know it'll hurt, so I'm fine with that, but I'm concerned about the long game. What will my parents say? How will I feel about it in 20 years? What about people at church?

I walk in, as nervous as the stuttering fluorescent lights. The tattooist hunches over a man, fishbelly pale, in the chair. The sound coming from the machine in his hand cuts angrily through the music, like a hundred hornets on the attack, but bigger, longer. Later, after handing over a wad of bills, the pale man gets out of the chair and smiles at me as he leaves. His right arm is taped up in sterile gauze, but his left is covered in images, horrible and fascinating, shoulder to wrist to every last finger.

I've never seen a "sleeve" before.

The person next to you

In recent years, tattoos – or the less stigmatizing "body art" – have become a cultural and social norm. They can be seen almost everywhere and on almost everyone, from the arms of the young man ringing through your groceries to the ankles of the young lawyer taking her colleagues out to lunch to the shoulder blade of the grandmother on the beach. You probably know someone who has one.

If you're in your autumn years, you might view tattoos as an act of rebellion or a way for esoteric or outsider groups to identify themselves to each other. Gang symbols. The faded, stretched marks of time served in the military. Jagged, scarred images telling of life in prison. In magazines, you might have seen Maori facial tattoos or ritual inking of Amazon royalty. Or something

else entirely, like crude, cruel numbers in Holocaust blue.

But whatever the association, tattoos were for other people, negative, unusual, suspicious, tragic.

If you're younger, though, you probably don't have those associations. Attitudes about tattooing have shifted enough that you probably view tattoos with the same level of surprise as seeing pierced ears or makeup on young girls or long hair and saggy jeans on boys. Even those who wander towards middle age, like myself, are becoming less and less surprised when we find out that our friends have been inked.

Or maybe, regardless of age or gender or race or social status, there's even more there: a love of tattoos, perhaps, or a longing to colour yourself with a permanent memory.

Meaningful tributes

Full disclosure: I got that tattoo back in '93. Fresh off a military training course that put a few extra dollars in my pocket and a dose of patriotism in my soul, I sat in the chair, handed over the design I'd been carrying around a long time, and marked myself for life. My tattoo, a small maple leaf with a cross standing in front, sits over my heart. God and country. God first.

For me, the meaning of my tattoo is paramount: it tells a story about what was most important to me at that time in my life. And I'm not alone; in talking to people with tattoos, the most common reason I encounter for getting inked is to commemorate important events or testify to important beliefs. The decorative side of body art – getting a tattoo just because it looks good – while common among non-Christians, is far less common for people of faith.

Deeper meaning for the wearer with the added dimension of paying tribute to our Higher Power: there is some powerful potential there. Joshua Clarke, Tenant Service Coordinator at Calgary's The Mustard Seed, recalls a recovering crack and alcohol addict having the Serenity Prayer tattooed on his forearm to remind him "of his journey, his past struggle, his need for grace." Jenny James, a high school religion teacher and former pastor, tells of a friend who chose to keep his tattoos from his "pre-Christian days" as a conversation starter about his faith walk. "I think God is happy with his decision," she says.

The temple

This shift in acceptance has prompted discussions amongst Christians about the appropriateness of tattoos, given that our bodies are temples of God as well as historically negative associations of branding conquered people. Rev. Canon Andrew Thompson, a chaplain serving in Abu Dhabi, cites St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "I will not mark my body as I believe that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," he says. As to the idea of ownership and branding of



Justin Bieber sports a Jesus tattoo.

other people, Thompson notes that tattoos can be "linked with the institution of slavery," which is "offensive to the ideal that we belong to God and that human beings were created to live in freedom."

The most common passage cited against tattooing is Leviticus 19:28, which explicitly forbids it, although most seem to agree that God is forbidding the practice of pagan funeral rituals rather than taking issue with the tattoos themselves. There are no other passages that mention tattoos by name, and thus Christians are entrusted to discern for themselves what is and isn't a barrier to the practice of one's faith. Pam Wright, who teaches and ministers to high school students in Kentucky, notes that it is essential to ensure proper balance when it comes to body art, which can be "filling a need, that God-shaped hole... an addiction like anything else."

The question about whether or not to get a tattoo, then, becomes a balance of common sense, faith and discernment. Rev. Ben Katt, a pastor at the Awake Church in Seattle, offers his own general response to the question of getting or not getting a tattoo: "I like good tattoos, he says. "There are a lot of bad tattoos out there." Lisa Verveda, who teaches high school biology at Surrey Christian School, focuses on the "expression of individuality" and the "lasting significance for the individual."

I have encountered a number of good questions Christians can ask themselves when thinking about getting a tattoo, particularly for younger people.

Why do I want to be tattooed?

Is my decision glorifying to God?

Am I fully confident and comfortable with how this tattoo could challenge my faith?

Could this tattoo offend or be a barrier to others around me?

Am I comfortable with the knowledge that this tattoo could be with me for life?

Am I defying the authority God gave my parents over me?

Am I legally of age to get a tattoo?

Am I ensuring my safety as I get this tattoo?

Will those around me support my decision?

So popular

The more we see tattoos on the street, the more we are freed to think about – and act upon – the urge to get our own. But that popularity might bring a challenge, potentially limiting how truly unique and meaningful the gesture is. Rev. Katt would agree: "Given the rise in popularity of tattoos, I am beginning to wonder if tattoos have lost that edge and have to do more with conforming to a particular culture." Rev. David Tigche-laar identifies the increased popularity of tattoos "as a fad" and more people getting them as "an argument against individuality."

Not necessarily, however. An increase in popularity can have a positive correlation to openness and accessibility to the story people tell with their body art. Rev. Paul Verhoef, the CRC chaplain at the University of Calgary, says, "I think it's clear that the social and cultural popularity of tattoos – changing from a sailors' thing to a prison thing to an anybody thing – has brought them more into my place of encounter and reflection. They have been normalized and de-stigmatized."

And an opportunity for conversation with those around us as well as ourselves. "In a general sense I find them intriguing. When I see someone's tattoo, I'm curious about [its] story," says Rev. Rob Datema, Executive Director of The Lighthouse, an outreach centre in Toronto. Rev. Verhoef recalls how a tattoo, thoughtfully presented, can act as "a bind to community." Clarke relays the words of his addicted friend, who tries to keep the conversation alive with himself in his most challenging moments: "I keep looking at my arm and praying that prayer. It reminds me that I never want to go back."

Summer, 2012

So, about that long game. It's covered most of the time, so I tend to forget about that little cross and maple leaf, my personal tribute to God and country, inked above my heart. But when it is on display at the pool or on the beach, I have had a number of chances to share my faith with family, friends, students, strangers.

The most common question: *Why is the cross in front of the maple leaf?*

Why, indeed.



David Beckham and his sleeve tattoo.

Read more about
Brent van Staalduinen at
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Features

Tattoos and resurrection

Paul VanderKlay

According to a recent *Slate* piece, we get tattoos to feel alive in our semi-awake, *Brave New World*, soma-holiday culture. People “are seeking an antidote to the numbed feelings and detachment that result from their idiotically screen-centered lives,” the story suggests, and “crave the enlivening, awakening, back-to-reality release which comes from the jabbing pain of a tattoo needle.”

I don’t have a tattoo and have no plans to ever get one – I’m in the “permanent bell-bottoms” opinion camp – so I had a long, good conversation with Brandon, a friend and member of my church. He’s got more and better ink than anyone else I know. Brandon told me a lot of stories about his tattoos and his life in that culture, but his opinion was simply “everyone’s got different reasons or no reason.” He also added, “I tell people: Don’t assume my insides match my outsides.”

Tattoos in our culture not long ago were the exclusive domains of sailors and carnies. Soon the practices migrated to prisons and gangs. Another friend of mine who is all tatted up from

that world told me of a dream he had where God removed his tats. For him it was a dream about rebirth. He had new skin, unblemished from his old, hard world of pain.

One thing Brandon mentioned to me was the obvious: they are scars. For some, tattoos are armour.

Where tattoos still communicate the “rebel carny outlaw socio-path,” they evoke the scar contest in *Jaws* between Quint, Brody and Hooper. Brandon noted, “We try to look hard on the outside because we feel soft on the inside.” Brandon said he mostly got his ink where it’s visible, while many today get inked in hidden, private places.

I’m not sure if what is behind the proliferation of tattoos is cutting, as *Slate* suggests, but rather the display of having been cut. A tattoo may say, “Look at me. I know something of this world of pain and beauty and I want to be seen in this realm.”

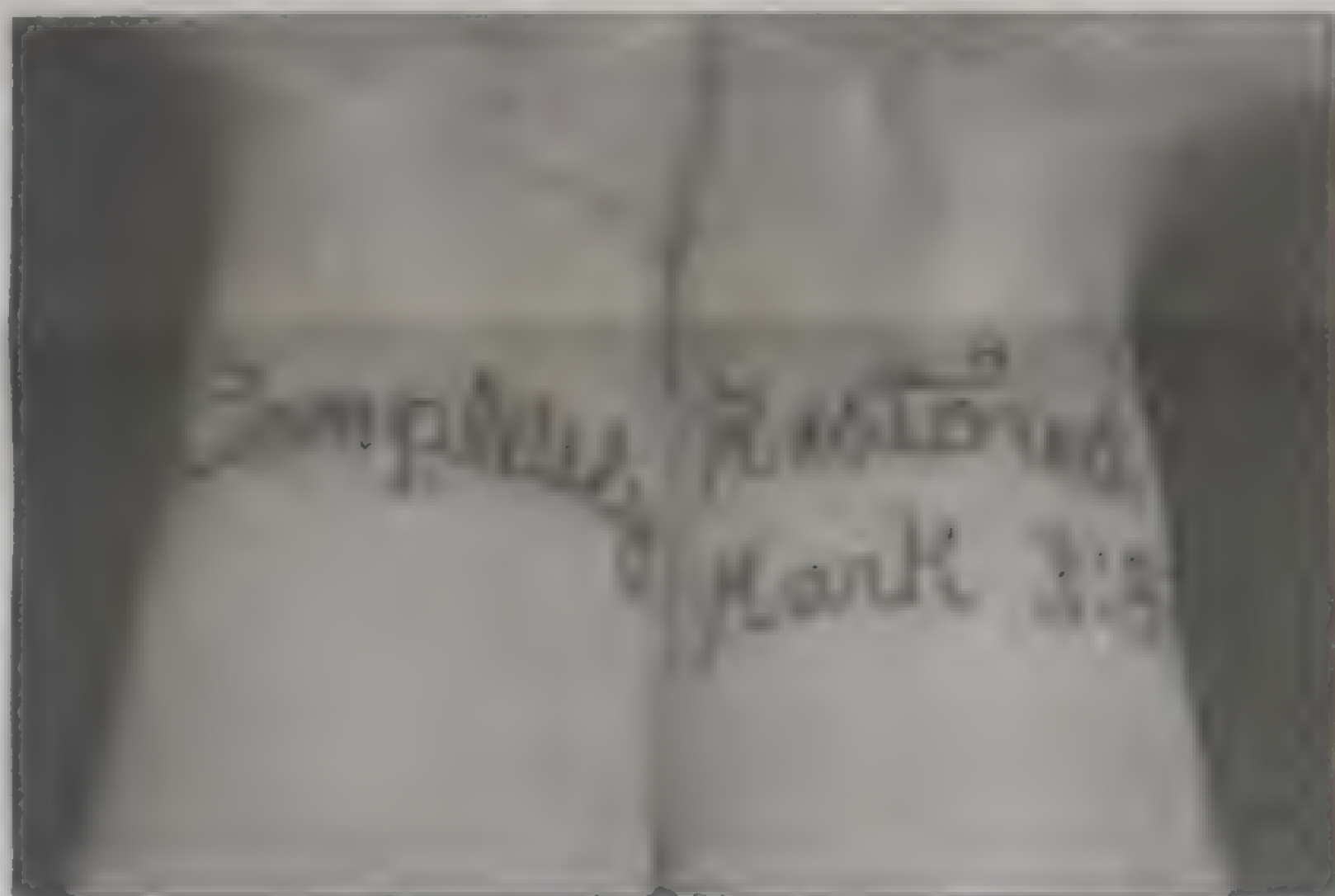
One of the most curious things

about the post-Resurrection accounts of Jesus is the scars of his wounds. Unlike my friend’s dream, Jesus’ creation 2.0 Resurrection body bears creation 1.0 scars. Jesus’ ink is not washed away. Why not?

I’ve made this point numerous times and, more often than not, people protest: “Those scars should be gone. Why do they remain?”

I think they might remain for the same reason people get tattoos. Jesus wants to be seen and known as having been cut, even in a perfect world. Jesus’ tattoos are the evidence of his sacrifice and his love and, in the light of the age to come, they are his glory.

Am I saying that my friend’s old gang tats will not be washed away in his resurrection? I don’t know, but they will be transformed just like the pain and hardship of this world.



The Resurrection is not Huxley’s soma, but a storied glory where the joy is magnified because of the cost. The Resurrection is no little league soccer trophy that everyone gets for having signed up for a team. It is a celebration of triumph that is magnified by the cost and challenge required to achieve it.

In this way tattoos may be a rather fitting icon for resurrection as glory and beauty achieved through painful scarring.

But I’m still not getting one.

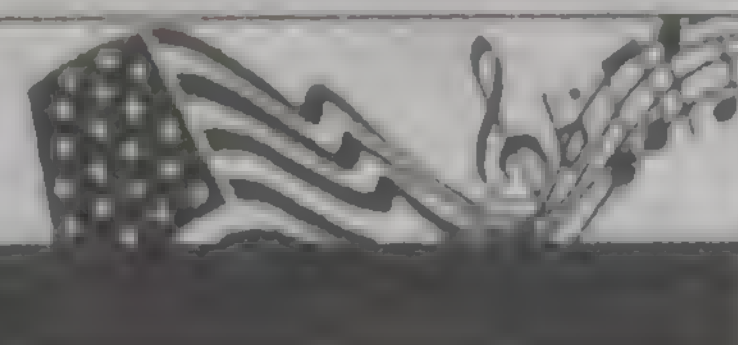
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From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til



‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy’: election revisited



I was blessed with parents who were diligent Bible readers. They were godly people who “tested the spirits” and taught their children to put on the mind of Christ. That was reinforced in church and at our Christian school. Even as a child, those lessons made me strongly aware that many people embrace the principalities and powers which fight against Christ’s church. At a tender age I absorbed the now highly politically incorrect truth that some are saved and some are not.

The “antithesis,” as Reformed theology calls it, was put in place by *God himself*. Behind each person’s response to God is either God’s irrevocable call or his condemnation. *God*, the Bible says, decided from the foundation of the world who are his redeemed and builds his church by “electing” his saints, calling us from the world. The confounding mystery here is that each of us is still responsible for our embracing or rejecting of God.

This maligned and misunderstood doctrine is called “unconditional election.” Should we still take it seriously? Does it matter whether we still believe it? Or does it just get in the way of evangelizing and people’s response to God? The Bible answers with an emphatic yes, yes and no.

Peter addresses his first epistle to “God’s elect, strangers in the world ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ by the sprinkling of his blood.” As he starts his second epistle Peter emphasizes that God’s divine power has given us “everything we need for life and godliness”; therefore, we must “be all the more eager to make [our] calling and election sure” (1:10).

Not one of us can rest on the laurels, so to speak, of our election. If I *am* called as one of God’s own, I must eagerly show the fruits of that calling. As James says, “Faith without works is dead.” As for missions, Jesus told his disciples, “I have sheep not of this fold.” That is: since he has not yet returned, many of his sheep are still to be found. They must hear his voice, and we must work to give them the opportunity. Election is no impediment to spreading the Gospel.

‘Is God unjust’?

In Romans 9, Paul begins a lengthy discussion of election by contrasting Abraham’s “children of the promise” with Israelites who reject the promise. “Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – [Rebekah] was told, ‘The older will serve the younger. Just as it is written: Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (9:11-13). Paul is quoting God speaking through Malachi: “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and

I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals” (Mal. 1:2-3).

Paul addresses the objection that springs to mind: “What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ It [our salvation] does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Paul cites the example of unbelieving Pharaoh, whom God told, “I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Paul then repeats, “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” (9:17-18).

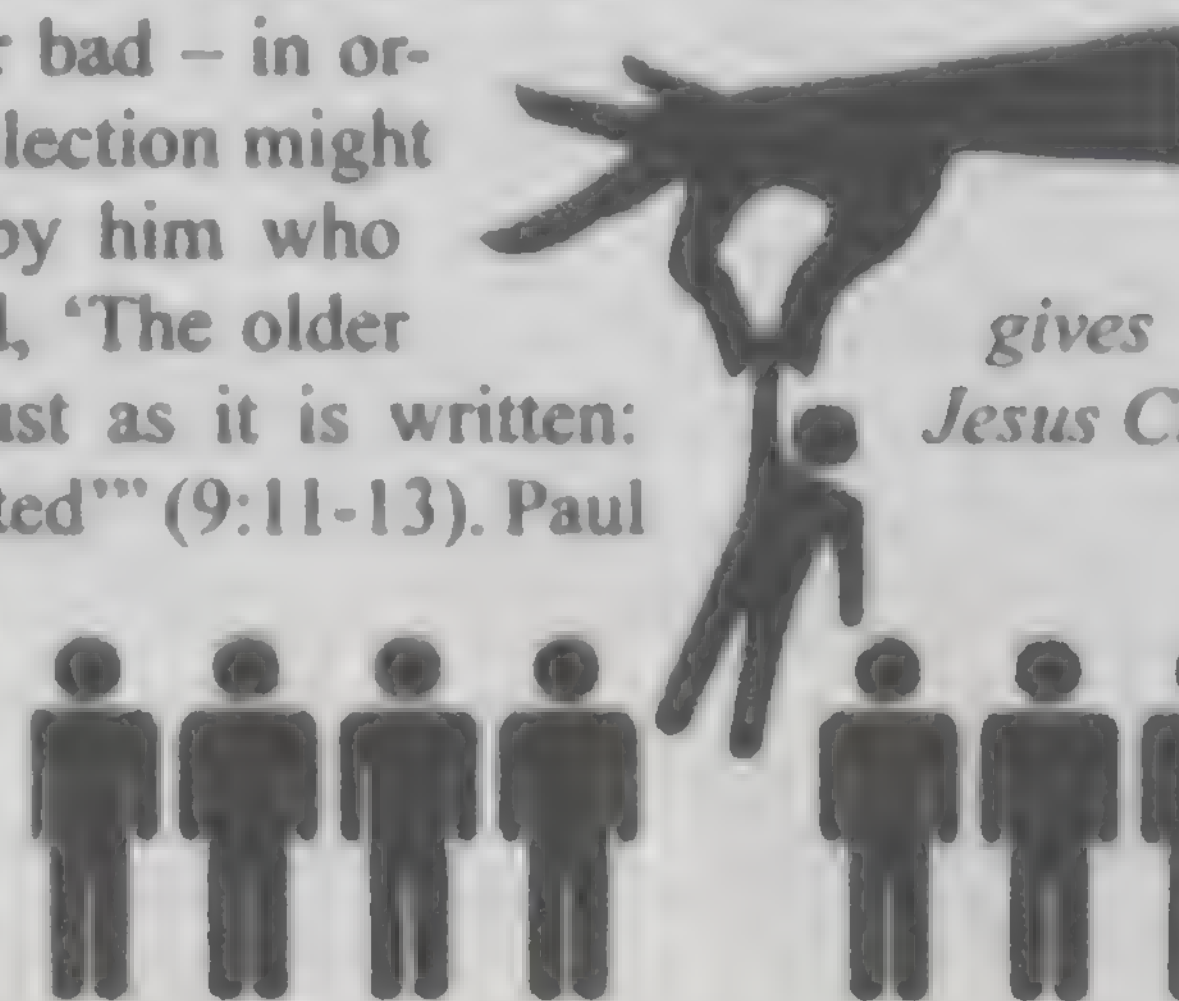
Again Paul anticipates objections. “One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’” His answer is this: “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?” (9:19-21). Paul also points out that even in choosing to show his wrath, God bears “with great patience the objects of his wrath” (v. 22).

Quoting God saying, “I will do what I wish to do” may not seem like much of an answer to our objections. But God’s electing a people for himself from out of the whole human race hangs on his absolute sovereignty and our being created by him; Potter and clay. God is, must be, utterly free to *be* God – to choose according to his own vast and intricate designs, not by our tiny, clouded picture. He is self-existing, self-determining, “I AM who I AM.” And in his being and choosing he is righteous and just. For Paul (as for us, I hope) God’s righteousness, justice (and mercy too) are intricately interwoven with “his unwavering commitment to uphold the honour of his name and the greatness of his glory” (cf. John Piper).

If, as we discussed last month, we post-Fall human beings are “totally depraved,” none of us can will our own reconciliation to God. He makes the first move and did so in eternity. And God’s electing us has this profound effect: “It shuts our mouths when it comes to boasting; it opens our mouths when it comes to praising his grace” (Piper). Neither my own willing nor my own acting are the grounds for my faith. Rather, faith is the most precious divine gift I will ever receive. Through his Spirit, God grafts us branches into Christ the Vine. Thanks be to God who

gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ➤

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY.



Columns

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



One foot in front of the other



A letter to my husband on our forty-fifth anniversary.

We live in beautiful British Columbia and some years ago we hiked the grueling and world renowned West Coast Trail. At first you were not convinced this would be our cup of tea. We were walkers, and hiking tough terrain had never been high on our activity list. Yet this unbelievable hike with its beautiful vistas remains a highlight in my life especially when challenges come my way and I remind myself – put one foot in front of the other and keep going!

You and I grew up in large immigrant families in which hard work, basic food and church on Sunday were constant staples. Growing up in large families left us with a group identity rather than seeing ourselves as separate and unique individuals. As a result, we lacked huge doses of self-awareness when we married. Still, in the first few years we lived in the bubble of romantic love and enjoyed the freedom that living on our own brought. But over time the romantic bloom fell off our relationship. We no longer put our best foot forward and got lost in asserting our views and rights.

We also believed when we married we were all grown up. Unfortunately, nothing was further from the truth. Marriage is about growing up together while walking the road of life with all its joys and turmoil this journey brings. And this is not the rambling of a New Ager. St. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century already said “sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing.”

Still, anyone who is close to us knows we have had a spirited marriage. And so, after 45 years of being together, and giving roots and wings to four adult children who in turn gave us four adult in-law children and over time a further eight grandchildren with one on the way from China – what is there left to say? Lots! And in honor of our milestone I will not dwell on

our struggles but on some of the good things you brought into my life.

Music, laughter, acceptance and growth

You brought music, the language of the heart, into our marriage. As a result, music has become an integrated part of my every day life. Especially in the last few years, music has been a major catalyst in helping me heal from the turmoil and trauma surrounding my mother's painful aging process.

You brought humour into our marriage. While humour can often be used as a defense mechanism because we do not want to deal with uncomfortable feelings, your humour rippled regularly through our family life lifting the dark shadows of every day misunderstandings.

You brought unconditional acceptance into our relationship no matter what was going on. You do not hold grudges and tomorrow is always a new day. Equally important is your ability to let me be the person I need to be which heavily influences who I am today. A current example is, understanding my need to care for my handicapped and aging mother. You could be resentful because of the time I spent with her but instead you marshal your resources and plan and prepare evening meals.

You brought family involvement into my life. You taught our children to swim, to skate and to fish. And when evening came you told them stories usually beginning with “once upon a time...” and often ending with you falling asleep yourself. But time goes on and now you are the “funniest Opa ever!”

During the last years you have brought an interesting twist to our lives. You have become a seeker of truth in terms of God and science. I marvel at the depth of your knowledge in this area and appreciate our conversations on this topic. They are often peppered with new but inclusive ways of seeing the world and its creator.

And so, after all these years of putting one foot in front of the other, I enjoy the beautiful vistas that are now part of our lives. At the same time, I am humbled and grateful to God. I do not know what the future will hold but I hope to continue “to have and to hold you” at my side for years to come.

Arlene Van Hove (avan-hove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.



Turning toward one another.

Caring from a distance

Sharon Osvald

A little over a year ago, our family was blindsided when my 81 year old mother suddenly began showing signs of vascular dementia, delirium and paranoia. Within weeks she went from being a mother to a child and though she now lives in a nearby nursing home, I became my mother's caregiver.

While, workload and anxiety is much higher for a live-in caregiver, there are many different types of caregivers. As the number of seniors continues to rise, more and more people (like us) will find themselves responsible – to varying degrees – for parents or relatives.

A few months back at a house party, I was surprised at how many people had a parent or parents in long-term care or on the verge of needing some care. Of course my radar is set to senior, but still at this small house party alone there were five couples (that I know of) with family members who needed elder care and most of them lived at least an hour's drive from that person. All of them were worried.



Looking back with a more discerning eye, we now see small changes had been taking place in our mother for years that we had just attributed to normal signs of aging. With a four-hour drive separating us, there were many things we missed and perhaps some things we didn't want to see. Author Bart Minszenthy says, “When it comes to aging, parents are in a state of denial and adult children in a state of avoidance.”

While there are days when the responsibility and concerns of caring for a parent close by are overwhelming, caring for a parent who lives far away is no picnic either. The guilt and the worry definitely go up a notch. It is hard to know by telephone or email conversations whether a relative's situation is changing or not. It is easy to over-react and under-react to a parent's changing moods, and impossible to get a handle on how they are really doing. There can be past baggage or personality issues to cloud the caregivers' judgement, causing them to think, “Mom always did exaggerate” or “Dad is just trying to make me feel guilty again.”

Changes that are noticed are often so subtle they could be related to other things. Often a parent becomes depressed after the death of their spouse or a move, making it difficult to tell the difference between stress, grief and dementia. Seniors can also develop temporary behavioural changes due to infections, vitamin deficiencies or reactions to medications that mimic the symptoms of Alzheimer's. Caring from a distance can be a daunting task.

Some suggestions

If you find yourself in this situation what should you do?

1. Make contact with a trusted neighbour, pastor, professional or friend of your far-away parent. Explain that you are concerned and request they let you know if there are any consistent changes to your loved one's behaviour, habits, memory or mood.
2. Contact your parent/relative often and consistently, but also try to reach them at different times of the day and week as well. This will help you see if there are any concerning patterns you might not have noticed. (How are they eating, sleeping, behaving?)
3. Note whether they are telling you the same thing over and over again or if the story is not the same every time. Are they having trouble with their speech and finding the correct words?
4. If you have reason to believe your parents are not taking adequate care of themselves, attempt to connect them with community care to create a plan that will give them some help in their home. (Many parents will resist this process. All you can do is try.)
5. Talk to your parent or relative and request that they give their physician, optometrist and other health care professionals' permission to share information with you. Sometimes seniors are unable to clearly communicate what their doctors have told them. This can leave adult children wondering what serious health risks their parents are experiencing. It will also help you to determine if your parents clearly understand their own diagnosis and health care instructions. This might be a good time to encourage Mom or Dad to assign a power of attorney for their personal care, in case you ever had to step in and make decisions for them.
6. Talk to your parents or relative about elder abuse and scams. Remind them that many people will try to take advantage of them financially. Request that they phone you before hiring a company to do a major repair or send money to anyone. Remind them to never give over any banking information.
7. Just try your best. Just like when we were teenagers and our parents couldn't make us do anything we didn't want to do, the same is true now for them.

Unless our parents are completely unable to care for themselves, all we can do is suggest alternatives. They may refuse them adamantly. We can only do our best without beating ourselves up with guilt for what we cannot do, knowing God is in control.

Sharon Osvald is a wife, mother and freelance writer from Brighton, Ont. She has a mother with vascular dementia and writes the blogs My Mother's Caregiver and My Mother's Caregiver Devotional found at mymotherscaregiver.com.



News / Classifieds

Job Opportunities



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American cities help students pay off debt

Kimberly Railey

College graduates steeped in debt have an unexpected ally to combat their student loans: local governments. But there's a hitch – they'll have to live in towns that might not boast the vitality and jobs of urban centers like Chicago and New York City.

In coming months, Niagara Falls, N.Y., will strive to lure young professionals to its languishing downtown by offering to help pay their student loans. In rural Kansas, income tax waivers and student loan repayments are being marketed to entice college graduates. And Nebraska, heeding Kansas' blueprint, may consider a similar relocation proposal in its 2012 legislative session.

The efforts are part of a small but growing trend among rural and Rust Belt cities to try to attract educated young people – a reflection of research that indicates they are often the best way to revitalize a depressed area. Since the last third to half of the 20th century, population growth in rural places has been eclipsed by urban centers, says Brett Theodos, a research associate at The Urban Institute, a non-partisan think tank based in Washington.

"These communities are eager and desperate to attract and retain people," Mr. Theodos says. "They also don't have a lot of resources to throw at the problem, so they need to shepherd their invest-

ments wisely."

In Niagara Falls, city officials marshalled \$200,000 to fund the new student loan incentive. Community development director Seth Piccirillo says the idea was born out of the realization that many college graduates nationwide are bogged down by debt – and are needed to give the town an economic makeover.

The city's once industrial-centered economy is now a shadow of its former self and its population has plummeted from 100,000 to 50,000 over 50 years. If the next census reveals any fewer residents, city leaders worry that they may lose some forms of federal assistance.

"We know that we need these young professionals in Niagara Falls to compete in the future," Piccirillo says. "At the same time, we know that these college graduates are starting off with this debt in a difficult economy. We wanted to figure out a program that would benefit both."

The result is an initiative that will guarantee \$7,000 over two years to 20 graduates of any higher-education institute. Though the first batch of applications won't be released for a couple of months, Piccirillo says he's already seen interest judging from the 200-plus e-mails and phone inquiries he's received – many from Western and Southern states.

If approved for the program,

applicants are required to rent an apartment or buy a home within a specific downtown area. The ultimate goal, Piccirillo says, is home ownership at the end of two years – even if for just six or seven of the newcomers.

"We're not trying to do something citywide," Piccirillo says. "We realize that resources are limited, so if you really try to do stabilization neighbourhood by neighbourhood, that's the wisest way in today's economy."

'Rural Opportunity Zones'

By contrast, the Kansas program, launched in July 2011, was designed for specific counties. Fifty are designated as Rural Opportunity Zones (ROZs), which offer Kansans income-tax waivers for up to five years and/or student loan repayments of up to \$15,000.

Areas with high unemployment in Kansas don't suffer from a lack of jobs but rather from finding people to hold those positions, he adds.

It's not only local governments that are spearheading ways to attract young adults, though. In Detroit, organizations have committed to revitalizing the downtown area. One is the Hudson Webber Foundation, which aims to attract 15,000 young adults to the city by 2015. Dubbed the "15 by 15" initiative, a patchwork of nonprofits, philanthropists and

business executives is pioneering efforts ranging from creating job opportunities to boosting safety for residents.

One of the foundation's highlights has been the "Live Downtown" initiative, in which employees at certain companies – such as Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Quicken Loans – receive perks for living in downtown Detroit. Incentives include up to a \$20,000 forgivable loan toward the purchase of a home or a \$2,500 allowance for first-year apartment renters.

'Live Downtown'

Jake Marmul, who works at Quicken Loans in Detroit, is benefiting from the \$2,500 rental subsidy. A Michigan native and 2011 graduate of the University of Notre Dame, he had his sights

set on living in Detroit but had trouble finding an affordable apartment near the Woodward area, where many of Detroit's cultural attractions are located. After learning last summer about the "Live Downtown" program, Marmul moved into a studio in May that overlooks Comerica Park, the Detroit Tigers' stadium.

"I probably have more friends that live in Chicago, but for the amount of money I'm spending and my location, there's just no way I could do that in any other city," Marmul says. He plans to stay in Detroit for the long haul and will be eligible to receive another \$1,000 toward his apartment if he renews his lease another year.

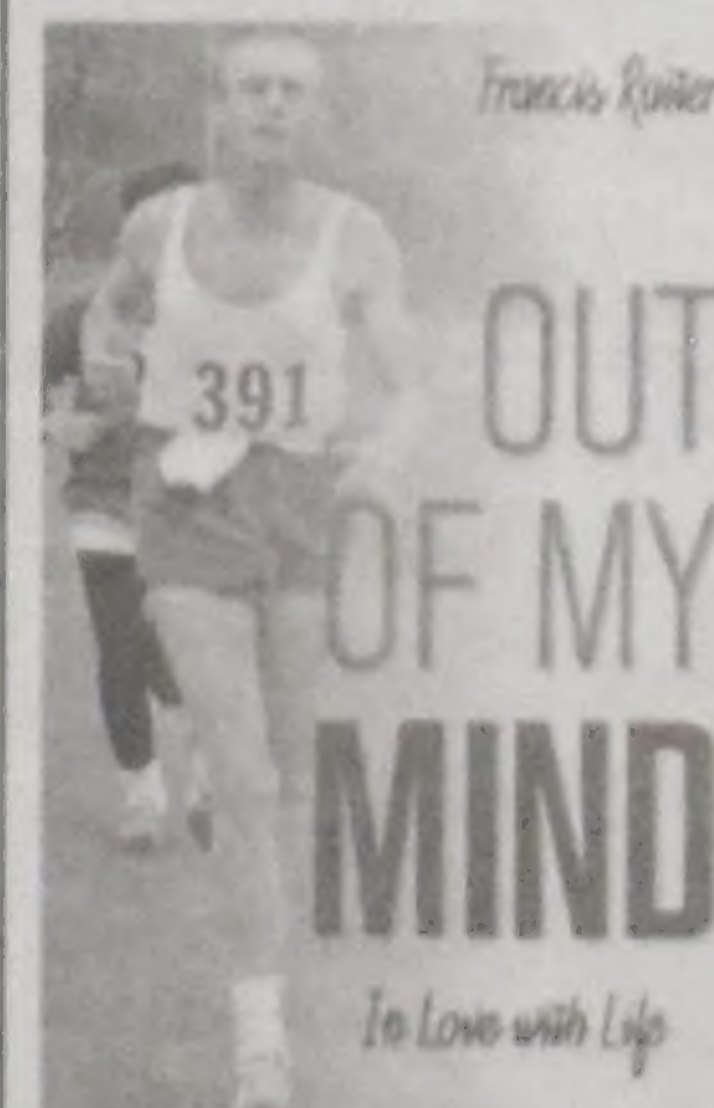
Kimberly Railey writes for the Christian Science Monitor.

Francis Ruiter, author of "Journal of a Dutch Immigrant" introduces his second book,

Out of my Mind: In love with Life

Francis continues to recount stories of his past. He reflects on life's hopes and fears, sorrow and joys. In his final entry, "Facing Darkness," the author relates his confrontation with, and emotional triumph over, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. This book also includes some interesting "Poetry".

Francis' books are available in Christian Book stores and in Chapters and Indigo stores or it can be ordered on-line at **Amazon.ca**.



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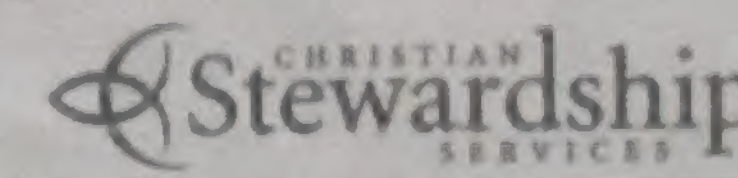
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Freddy Veldkamp

Noortje van Middelkoop

Harm Hoeve

Thursday Sept. 18th Ancaster, Redeemer College Auditorium at 8.00 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop, also "Musica Sacra Chorus", www.musicasacrachorus.com with Johann Vanlittersum as director,
James van den Brink on the organ. Redeemer University, 277 Garner Rd E, Ancaster, Ont. L9K 1J4.
Info: 905-648-2131.

Wednesday Sept. 19th Grimsby, Mountainview Christian Reformed Church at 8.00 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop. Mountainview CRC, 290 Main St. West, Grimsby, Ont. L3M 1P8. Info 905- 945-0004

Friday Sept. 21st Brampton, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop. Holland Christian Homes, 7900 McLaughlin Rd, Brampton, Ont. L6Y5A7. 905-459-3333.

Friday Sept. 21st Georgetown, Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop also "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. www.liberationchoir.com.
Christian Reformed Church, 11611 Trafalgar, Georgetown, Ont. L7G 4T1 Information: 905-877-4322.

Saturday Sept. 22nd Whitby, Durham Christian Homes at 1:30 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop. Durham Christian Homes, 200 Glen Hill Drive South, Whitby, Ont. L1N 9W2. Info: 905-430-1666

Monday Sept. 24th Kingston, First Christian Reformed Church at 8.00 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop. First CRC, 310 Kingscourt, Kingston, Ont. K7K 4R3. Info 613-542-8350.

Wednesday Sept. 26th Ottawa, Calvin Christian Reformed Church, at 8.00 pm

"Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve on the organ and on pan flute
Noortje van Middelkoop also "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director, Tina van Vlaanderen
on piano. www.ottawacarletonmalechoir.com
Calvin Christian Reformed Church, 1475 Merivale Rd. Ottawa, Ont. K2E 5N9. Information: 613-293-9046.

Thursday Sept. 27th Peterborough, Cephas Christian Reformed Church, at 8.00 pm

"Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director, Harm Hoeve organ and Noortje van
Middelkoop pan flute. Cephas CRC, 220 Goodfellow Rd. Peterborough Ont. K9J 5X3. Info 05 743 4904/4544

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The members of "Musica Sacra Chorus" from Woodstock with Johan van Ittersum - James van den Brink

The members of "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" from Ottawa with Margaret van Dyk - Tina van Vlaanderen

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- Harm Hoeve and Noortje van Middelkoop

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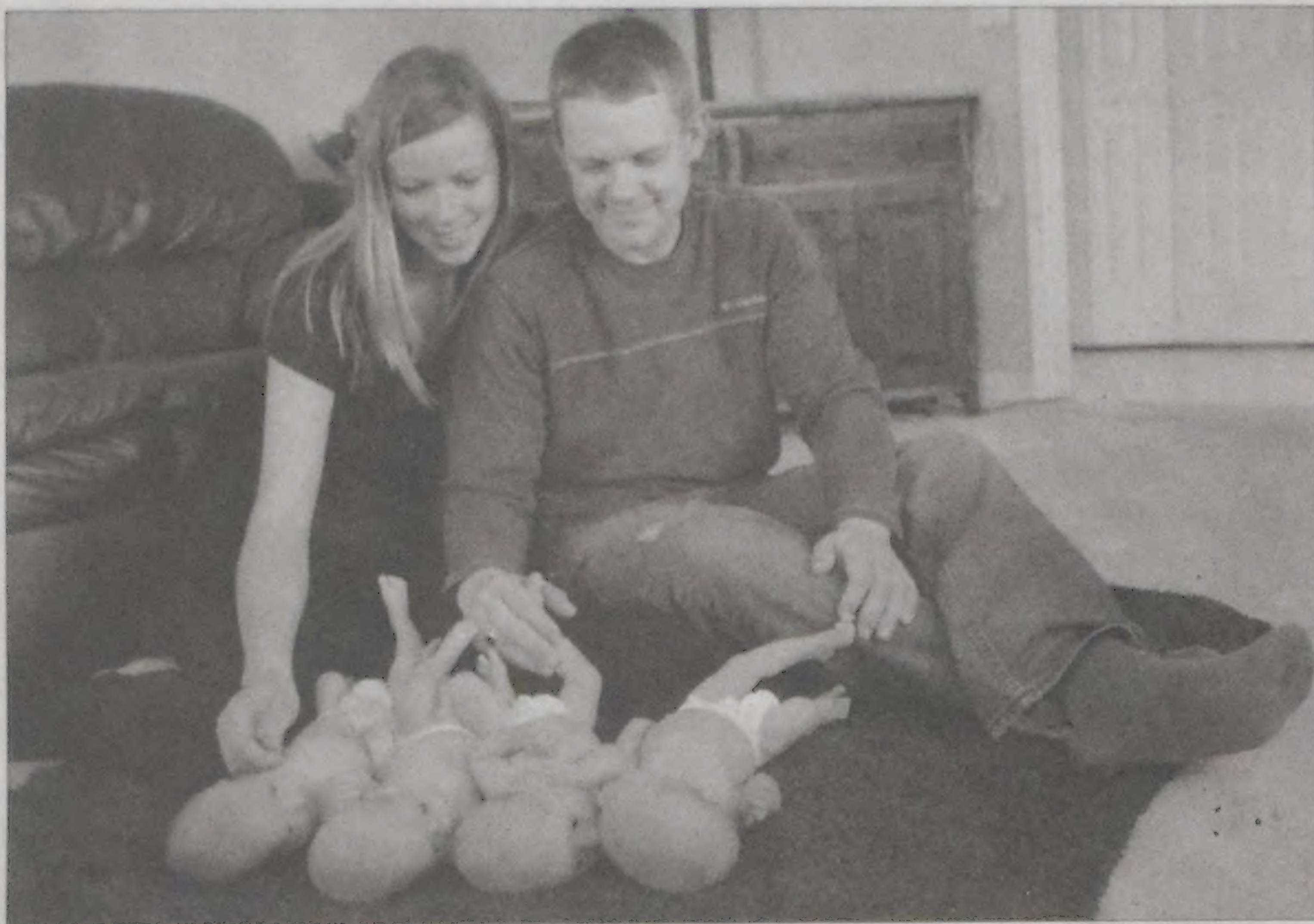
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News



LINDSAY PALMER

Mike and Angela Scharringa admire their quadruplets.

It's a girl! And another girl! And two boys!

Justine Alkema

April 13 was a momentous day for Mike and Angela Scharringa and for those connected to them. At 11:33 a.m., Angela gave birth to a set of quadruplets at McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton.

Bringing the quads into the world included a lot of preparation for the parents. For Angela it meant spending the last 10 weeks of her pregnancy in the hospital on bed rest, and for Mike it meant doing all of the other preparations by himself. Angela said, "I couldn't do that much, visitors cut up the day a lot; Mike came every night, there wasn't one day he missed, that made it doable." Angela worked as a cardiac technician at McMaster before she became pregnant, so she said "that helped; coworkers visited." She said, "I couldn't sit up. I couldn't eat sitting up. At the beginning I didn't because they didn't want me to, at the end it was because I couldn't [...] I learned to crochet. I made a lot of blankets."

There were preparations that had to be made, preparations that aren't considered to be "normal" for having a baby. For example, they had to buy a new house and car. She said they were "so excited, but scared. We went back and forth." Her family's reaction was the same. They were thrilled, but also said "Oh my goodness."

Mike and Angela were extremely thankful to give birth to four healthy babies. First was Faith at 4 lbs. 8 oz., then came Leah at 4 lbs. 3 oz., Joel at 3 lbs. 10 oz. and Louis at 4 lbs. 8 oz. They were born by C-section and were 2 minutes apart. Angela said that "The doctors were impressed with how everything went [...] They were really happy with their size." Angela said she wasn't expecting to hear them cry when she gave birth to them. She assumed they would have to be incubated right away, or put on oxygen. She said when Faith, the oldest, was born, she was excited to hear her cry. She said, "That was pretty awesome."

The question that is often asked when people hear their story is, "How do you do it?" The

Scharringas expressed their deep appreciation for all the support they have received. Mike works for the family business during the day, but says that "I don't do anything after supper anymore." During the day, when Mike isn't there, Angela almost always has someone with her, whether it be her mom, sister, aunt or someone else. Their church family has also pitched in. Members of Dundas Calvin Christian Reformed Church, relatives and friends in the community have a schedule set up to deliver meals to the family. They've received many gifts, both from people connected to them and from businesses in the area.

Their everyday life revolves around the quads. Angela said, "I love being a mom." When asked how it is different to have four babies instead of one, Angela found it difficult to answer, because as she puts it, "I don't know anything different." Mike said, "You do become a bit of a spectacle." Everywhere they go people are curious. Mike also said, "It's tougher to move around, you need two people to go somewhere." Angela mentioned, "I can't just run out and pick up something, which would be different if you had one baby." They have two double strollers for walking the babies. However since they're still small, they can fit all four in one of the strollers. "They calm each other down when they're by each other," Angela pointed out.

Angela said that through the process, "McMaster was awesome, the nurses were great." Despite the hard work, the parents love it. They love the support, they love the change and they love the babies. "Have quadruplets is crazy," Mike said with a smile. But they made it clear that it is also a blessing.

Justine Alkema grew up in Waterdown, Ont. She is currently studying English Writing at the University of Waterloo.



Odds and Trends

Aquatic humanoids?

During Christopher Columbus' voyage to the New World in 1493, the explorer reported seeing three mermaids from a distance near the coast of what is now Haiti. In his journal Columbus complained that upon closer view the mermaids were "not as pretty as they are depicted" and that in fact "somehow in the face they look like men." Scientists have long believed that what Columbus saw was probably a group of manatees, large aquatic mammals sometimes referred to as "sea cows." A recent television show entitled *Mermaids: The Body Found*, however, has given renewed credence to Columbus' mermaid sighting, at least in some sectors. The show, which aired on The Animal Planet network, was shot in documentary style and suggested that "there might be a kernel of truth that lives beneath the legend of the mythic mermaid." But not everyone was convinced. Soon after the show aired, the American National Ocean Service – an institution usually dedicated to serious oceanographic research – posted on their website that "no evidence of aquatic humanoids has ever been found." Any sign of the Loch Ness Monster?

A bad day for Bigfoot

Speaking of mythical monsters, May 8 was a bad day for Bigfoot – at least if he lives in Texas. That's the date on which the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ruled that it is legal to hunt and kill sasquatches. While some jurisdictions, such as Skamania County, Wash., have outlawed the hunting and killing of sasquatches, Texas law allows for the killing of "nongame" animals – creatures not hunted for food – as long as they are indigenous to the state. Because the Texas Bigfoot Research Conservancy (a society dedicated to the study of sasquatches) has documented hundreds of sightings going back several decades, the sasquatch could easily be "proven" indigenous if someone were ever to kill one. So if Bigfoot actually is out there somewhere in the woods, he now has more reason than ever to avoid humanity. As it happens, Americans aren't the only ones who believe in Bigfoot (although they may be alone in wanting to hunt and kill him for sport). A recent Angus Reid poll found that 21 percent of Canadians believe sasquatches are real, and enough Russians believe in the sasquatch's eastern relative, the yeti, that the Russian government has sponsored yeti-finding trips and even contemplated setting up a yeti research institution.

Incredible jump

If mermaids and sasquatches seem unbelievable, try this on for size: in August an Austrian daredevil named Felix Baumgartner will attempt to break the world record for a parachute jump by leaping from 120,000 feet above the earth. If successful, Baumgartner's jump – which will be sponsored by the energy drink company Red Bull – will break the record held by American Air Force Captain Joseph Kittinger. In 1960 as an experiment for the American space program, Kittinger rode a helium balloon to the edge of space and – wearing only a thin pressure suit and a small oxygen tank – jumped out of his basket from approximately 102,800 feet above the earth. It took only a few seconds for Kittinger to accelerate to around 600 miles per hour, a velocity approaching the speed of sound. His free fall lasted more than four and a half minutes before his parachute opened at 14,000 feet and he began a more gentle descent to safety on the earth below.

Lightning weapon?

Equally true but perhaps less believable than Kittinger's jump is the fact that the U.S. Army is currently attempting to weaponize lightning. Experiments at a U.S. Army lab have succeeded in using lasers to create an energized plasma channel in the air that serves as an invisible pathway for electricity to follow. By shooting electricity down these channels, Army scientists were able to hit and destroy simulated targets. All of this sounds a lot like Emperor Palpatine from *Star Wars*, who uses the force to shoot lightning out of his hands. Perhaps the next big military innovation will be an army of Wookies to do the fighting on our behalf. If so, they'd better steer clear of Texas: Wookies look a lot like Bigfoot.

Michael Buma

